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THE HOUR OF CONFLICT

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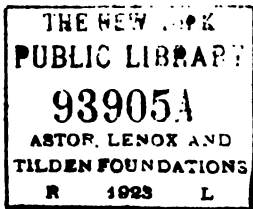
THE HOUR OF CONFLICT

BY
HAMILTON GIBBS

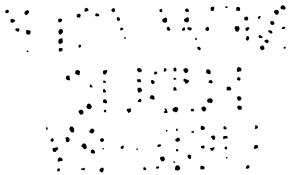
"IT IS WHEN THE HOUR OF CONFLICT IS OVER,
THAT HISTORY COMES TO A RIPE UNDERSTAND-
ING OF THE STRIFE, AND IS READY TO EXCLAIM,
'LO! GOD IS HERE, AND WE KNEW IT NOT.'"

Bancroft.

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

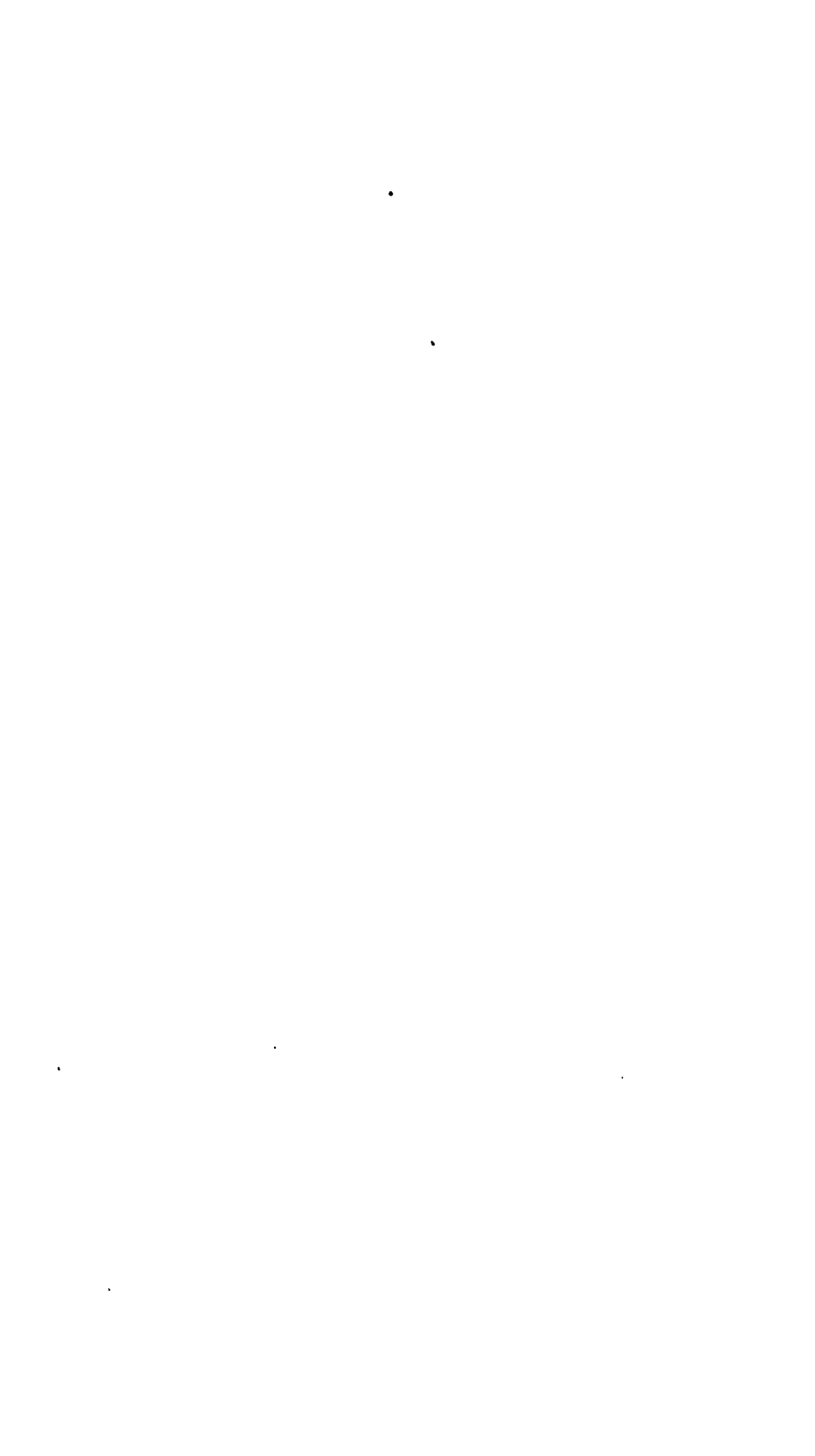


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TO
M. M.
IN MEMORY OF
THE WINDY
CITY,
1918

Part I



THE HOUR OF CONFLICT

CHAPTER I

THERE were two girls on the strip of grass outside the Café Tardot. One of them, brown and strongly built, with thick black hair burnt at the edges by the sun, full lips, and large dark eyes which sparkled like a gipsy's, was swinging an old driver, following through in perfect style with all her weight and strength.

"Oh, Marthe! If that had been a ball . . ." she threw up her hand in an expressive gesture.

Marthe leaped up from the grass and reached out for the club. "Let me have a go. I'll show you!" She took the driver and began to waggle at a dandelion.

The May sun made little shimmers of heat dance for joy on the crisp turf of the links and threw the shadows of the children sharply behind them on to the wide, dusty road which climbed up from the Café until it breasted the headland,—beneath which the sea lapped softly on the warm sands,—and then ran quickly down the other side into Wimereux.

The two caddies were both about eighteen years old, both children of the labouring classes, whose one duty in life was to get early to the links in the morning, weekdays or Sundays, wet or fine, and bring back the greatest possible number of francs every week. But while the dark one, Jeanne, showed her origin in every line of her tanned face and by the manner in which she spoke

The Hour of Conflict

and moved, the fact that the other girl was a caddy seemed incredible.

Marthe's blue print frock, darned stockings and thick boots looked curiously wrong,—a mistake. She wore them with an air. And when you saw her face you began to marvel. A pure oval it was with a tiny, pink-lipped mouth, a straight, short nose, sky-blue eyes and hair of a rich, soft gold that disobeyed all bows and pins and broke into irresistible kinks and curls. The hands that gripped the club, though nearly as brown as Jeanne's, were small and delicate and, unlike the other girl's, clean. When she smiled the corners of her eyes crinkled and her teeth, tiny and regular, were almost transparent. It was as if you had caught some fairy or mermaid amusing herself by playing at being a mortal. At the very least you would have believed her a changeling, a belief strengthened by the curiously refined lines of her and the impish gleam in her blue eyes.

She took her stance with an intense and minute care, swung from the hips until the head of her club was over her upraised left heel, drove with amazing strength—and sent a great chunk of grass flying into the road.

"Well hit!" cried Jeanne sarcastically, clapping her hands. She was quite a striking girl whom you would have turned your head to look at in the street, but by the side of Marthe she became almost unnoticeable.

Marthe held your eyes. You waited to see what she would do next, as if she might change into something else at any minute or even vanish altogether.

She had forgotten golf and was gazing at the hill with parted lips as if at some wonderful thing. Jeanne saw the expression of excitement in her face and turned to look also.

The Hour of Conflict

It *was* something wonderful,— a carriage, an open *voiture de place* with two horses and luggage beside the driver and a straw-hatted passenger,— the first swallow of summer, the first hint of a new season. It was sufficient to make not only these two children excited but to bring Madame Tardot on to the doorstep of the *café* on hearing their exclamations.

A little plump woman was Madame Tardot of very comfortable proportions, on whose upper lip you perceived the signs of a promising moustache. Her character was revealed by her garments. Her respect for the conventions led her to wear a black skirt, but her habitual cheeriness of disposition, the love of doing things and seeing life,— in however small a way,— which made her the proprietress of a *café*, caused her to assume a gay mauve blouse.

“Here he comes!” she cried. “The very first of the year and he comes to me and not to the hotel down yonder. It is good!”

The carriage, eagerly watched by these three very different people, rumbled down the hill on its tyreless wheels with a noise resembling thunder to the accompaniment of pistol-shot crackings of the driver’s whip.

“An Englishman!” said Jeanne in a low voice.

Marthe said nothing. She was taking in the top half of the new arrival as the carriage drew up with a flourish and many ejaculations on the part of the driver in front of the *Café Tardot*. She remained silent when the Englishman got out and the bottom half of him proved to be in brown golfing knickers to match his coat, and brown stockings and shoes. But when Madame Tardot, with all the grace and courtesy of a marquise, as she thought, descended one step and said, “*Bonjour*,

The Hour of Conflict

Monsieur Leyden. Welcome," Marthe edged forward one or two paces and listened with all her ears.

The Englishman raised his hat, went up the steps and held out his hand. "Bonjour, Madame. Here I am at last. The train was half an hour late from Boulogne." His French was as fluent as Madame's.

Madame burst into lamentations of sympathy and ushered her guest with great pomp into the café.

Then Marthe returned to the strip of grass across the road and swung her club again, humming a little song to herself and taking no further interest in the carrying in of his baggage which Jeanne was watching keenly.

"Monsieur Leyden," murmured Marthe to herself. "I like that name," and she went on humming, with a sort of a grunt on the final syllable of each line, "Je suis le beau Narcis—*se*. . . ."

CHAPTER II

EVERARD FORTESCUE LEYDEN closed the door of his bedroom, thrust his hands into his breeches pockets and looked round the room. There was a cynical expression in his eyes and, as they passed from the cheap washstand with the linoleum square at its foot to the high walnut wardrobe whose centre panel was of looking-glass and then on by way of the carved-wood, cane-bottom chair in front of the closed window to the solid, stuffy walnut bed on which, although the weather was hot, there lay an eiderdown, his lips took a scornful, downward turn.

As he leaned against the door, produced an elaborate case and lit up after tapping his cigarette on it, you would have guessed his age as twenty-four. His brown golf suit had the word Varsity stamped all over it. But why the cynical expression at that age? Was it just a pose assumed by a man who, being temporarily short of money, was compelled to pass his vacation at what he termed a second-rate hovel?

The expression was not new. It was habitual. By invariably throwing sneering sarcasms at every established institution at Oxford he had earned for himself the nickname of the "Disbelieving Jew." His face gave the lie to it. It was clean cut, sensitive, intellectual, giving the impression of a man of imagination and responsiveness, a man who should have been affected to the innermost roots of him by the extraordinary atmosphere of Oxford. Yet Oxford had cast him forth in mid-

The Hour of Conflict

career as being no true son of hers and the cynicism became even more pronounced.

He moved from the door and flicked off a fraction of ash from his cigarette to the floor with an impatient exclamation: "God, what a place!"

His shirt cases had been carefully arranged against the wardrobe by the one servant of the little café. Leyden tossed one of them on to the bed and opened it with quick fingers. Ties, socks, stockings fell out in a tangled heap and made a many-coloured patch on the eiderdown. He emptied the bag of collars, vests and shirts and dropped it into a corner. Little puffs of smoke swished round him as he moved to the wardrobe and began to litter the various shelves with anything that came first to hand. When he had put away everything he crossed to the window, moved the carved chair on one side, and pulled it wide open. His eyes jumped quickly from point to point—the undulating green of the links facing him with the red and yellow flags flapping in the breeze, the red-roofed club house with its white-pillared veranda, the sand dunes planted with rushes and cut in two by the wide, dusty road, and to the extreme left the line of sea as it ran along the beach in a half circle to Ambleteuse,—a little cluster of jumbled houses guarded by what appeared to be a fort sticking up out of the water. The sun, creeping relentlessly down into the sea, shed that curiously clear light which characterises the short half hour before its final setting, when everything is picked out in greater detail than at any other moment of the day. But the intensified beauty of the quiet scene stirred no emotion in the young Englishman as he stood smoking at the bedroom window in the little café. His eyes merely noted the general look

The Hour of Conflict

of the place and then were drawn irresistibly to the two girls on the strip of grass.

They had grown tired of driving imaginary balls and were standing, backs to the wind, with their heads and hands very close together. Everard Leyden began to wonder what the golden head and the black head were conspiring when all at once a thin film of smoke wafted out from between them. A delighted mischievous chuckle broke from Marthe. Somehow or other she had captured two cigarettes and they stood there blowing out clouds with vast enjoyment, quite unconscious of the fact that they were being watched.

A group of workmen on the way back to their homes came tramping round the bend in the road, one hand grasping the bag slung over their back, the other swinging from right to left in the untidy but cover-the-ground manner peculiar to the French ex-soldier rustic. Leyden noted with a smile that the two girls held their cigarettes behind them until the men passed.

But it was annoying only seeing their backs. He rattled the window and cleared his throat.

Marthe swung round instantly, looked up and muttered something to her companion. Jeanne turned also and they both eyed the Englishman with a frankly interested stare. Was he not the only Anglais yet arrived? Had they not seen his great bag of clubs? He was their property — that is, of one of them at least, for each was positive that she would carry for him in the morning.

“The caddy master will give his clubs to *me!*” announced Marthe with an air of prophetic certainty.

“Think so!” snapped Jeanne, her competitive instincts roused. “Because your father’s dead you think you can carry for everybody.”

The Hour of Conflict

Marthe shrugged her shoulders. "Ça ne me touche pas! Perhaps Monsieur . . . Machin . . . Chose, from Boulogne, will come to-morrow. You can have *him*."

"Merci! He takes twenty to every green and only gives four sous pourboire."

During this wrangle their eyes never left Leyden and the man for whom they were quarrelling was marvelling at the strange beauty of the golden-haired child. The dark one was all right, but by Jove the fair kid was unique.

She was so different from the ordinary "pretty child" whose expensively dressed hair glistened in the sun in the Park. She seemed more grown up, possessed of a greater perception, and as she stood there meeting his eyes with a half smile on her lips he leaned slightly out of the window and produced his cigarette case once more. He held it up and raised his eyebrows at them. He was puzzled as to the meaning of her expression and greatly interested.

Jeanne dashed across the road at once with complete understanding and stood under the window with up-raised hands. Leyden looked down at her for a moment and dropped one cigarette. "What do they call you?" he asked.

The girl made a snatch at the cigarette and just caught it with a little shriek of triumph. "Jeanne," she answered.

Leyden looked across the road. Marthe was leaning on her club watching. He beckoned to her. She hesitated a moment and then came slowly across.

"Don't you like Egyptians?" asked the boy.

Marthe nodded.

"Well then?" said Leyden. He held out two.

The Hour of Conflict

Marthe dropped her club and took up the corners of her apron. The cigarettes fell into it.

"Are you a Marie or a Marguerite?" asked Leyden. The child wagged a finger. "Neither," she said.

"What then?"

"Marthe," said Jeanne, feeling that she was being left out.

"Thanks," said Leyden. Jeanne was one of a type. "Then, Marthe, will you carry for me to-morrow morning?"

A quite different expression came into the child's eyes. Her look of mischievous fun gave place to one which you would have expected to see on the face of a Wall Street broker who pulls off a wonderful deal. It was extraordinary. Leyden was struck by it. "Poor little devil," he thought. "She's probably spanked if she doesn't bring home a sufficient number of francs."

"What time?" asked Marthe eagerly.

Leyden waved his hand indecisively. "Oh . . . say ten o'clock."

"Ten o'clock. Bien Monsieur." She turned to Jeanne. "What did I tell you, hein? . . . Bonsoir Monsieur." She picked up her club again and stowed away the cigarettes, after examining them minutely, into a little red pocketbook which she produced from under her apron. When she had gone about ten yards she turned, saw Leyden still looking after them and said in English, "Goodnight, sair. Verree pretee shot indeed."

A somewhat self-conscious giggle was followed by a simultaneous rush down the road.

Leyden smiled and turned away from the window. As he did so a tap fell on the door.

The Hour of Conflict

"Your dinner is served, Monsieur." The voice was a woman's, a young woman's.

Leyden raised his eyebrows. The daughter? . . . She would probably be abortively commonplace but there was just a chance. "Thank you," he replied. "I'm coming."

CHAPTER III

THE "Café Tardot et du Golf Club" was an ordinary little French seaside café. You entered by a glass door and found yourself in a large, clean, tiled room with a bar, a dresser piled with many-hued bottles and glasses, and one or two small tables, each flanked by two chairs. Out of this room was what might have been, and looked like, an aviary or a conservatory. Its roof and sides were of glass, and in accordance with the characteristic dread of "courants d'air" none of the panes were made to open. Little slits worked by a string attached to a trigger made some attempt to ventilate what in the summer months became a sweltering sun trap. It was the *salle-à-manger*, obviously built on out of the profits of an ever-increasing business,—thanks to the advent of the Golf Club. Another door, also glass, panelled with a weird assortment of reds and greens, opened into the salon.

The salon was the pride of the establishment. It boasted a carpet, whose colours formed a beautiful discord with those of the glass door, and a piano which only those who had no ear for music ever opened. The whole wall space between the windows was occupied by a vast mirror, cracked alas! on one side. In addition to all these triumphs Madame had been at great pains to select an assortment of charming nicknacks which she had arranged with the eye of an artist. Two native women in

The Hour of Conflict

imitation bronze carrying water pitchers smirked in a most décolleté garb on either side of the marble and gold clock. A sort of Pierrot in white china stood on the walnut sideboard and his head rattled on his neck as Madame walked across the room. Studies in still life drew your eyes like magnets to the walls — piles of luscious fruit placed as by the hand of a railway refreshment room lady on golden dishes, although no two kinds of the fruit appeared in the same season, plates of meat, knives and forks, bottles of Pilsener and daily papers, all painted with a horrible exaggeration of realism.

The corner table of the *salle-à-manger* from which there was a beautiful view of sea, road and links, all soft in the golden sunset, had been arranged for Leyden. A steaming soup tureen caught his eye as he came in from the café bar. He sat down wondering who the owner of the voice was. A door opened and shut. There was a step on the tiles and Leyden saw a small, thin servant girl in apron and cap peering at him from the doorway. "What will Monsieur drink?" she said.

Leyden's pessimism was all too correct. The voice was that which had summoned him to the meal. His disappointment made him avoid her eye. "Where's the wine list?"

The damsel produced one from the sideboard and laid it open at his elbow.

The Englishman glanced through the beers, turned to the wines and gave his order.

As he ate his meal in silence a growing feeling of restlessness swept over him. He was the only person staying in the café, the season was not yet begun, the Casino in Wimereux, about which he had been careful to make enquiries, was not open and in this outlandish spot

The Hour of Conflict

there didn't seem to be a thing to do. And there were the long evenings to kill.

He drummed on the table with his fingers and looked along the road. Very occasionally a motor flashed by in a cloud of dust, wound its way to the foot of the sand dunes, breasted the rise, growing smaller and smaller, and disappeared down the other side. An odd-looking cart rather like that of a commercial traveller with emaciated horses, jogged along determined to arrive sooner or later in the town. But none of these offered attractions to the man at the Café Tardot. When the servant brought in coffee and cognac he spoke. "Is there anything to do here?"

The girl looked surprised. "Will not Monsieur play the golf?"

Leyden's foot shifted irritably. "One cannot do so in this light," he said icily. "Is there no café-concert, nothing?"

"There will be the Casino at Wimereux in the season if Monsieur stays till then."

An expression floated into Leyden's mind which he had heard used by a Rhodes Scholar. He applied it to the maiden whose brain wasn't as nimble as he would have liked. "You make me tired," he said in English, and she, to his intense surprise, replied, "I am sorree, bu! I do not look eet."

She followed the remark by a series of chicken noises, as though in triumph at having laid a verbal egg, and retired through the bar, leaving a trail of giggles behind her.

Left alone again with his thoughts Leyden lit a cigar. There seemed to be nothing for it but to make the best of a bad job and wait to see what the morrow would

The Hour of Conflict

bring forth. If it brought nothing—well, he would shake the dust of Madame Tardot from his shoes and catch the first train to Paris.

Paris was alive. His cigar smoke trickled through his nostrils and in it he saw the lights of the d'Harcourt, heard the strains of the orchestra, saw himself sitting at the corner table outside commanding a view of the Boul' Miche' and the street running at right angles, surrounded by the hundred types of the Quartier,—students arguing hotly over their many-coloured drinks, hirondelles du trottoir swaying along in front of the tables with the faint smile at the corner of the lips, old cronos, toothless and grey, creeping in and out of the tables calling like mangy peahens, "La Presse! . . . La Presse!"—and all the time the rumble of traffic, the clatter of heels, the incessant voices, all forming a wonderful accompaniment to the jigging fiddles and the tatum of the piano. . . .

The light was very faint as Leyden sat there motionless gazing into the thick, blue cigar smoke and suddenly the waltz of the d'Harcourt orchestra changed into a soft love song.

"Le soleil tombe au sein des flots,
La terre a les yeux clos;
Ma douce allons nous en tous deux . . .

Paris faded and the boy sat quickly up in his chair. The voice was very sweet and came nearer and nearer. He peered out through the glass into the road and saw a girl, tall and slim, walking along with a kind of lilt, keeping time to the song.

"Ma douce allons nous en tous deux
Le long des chemmins creux, la la!

The Hour of Conflict

Ma douce allons voir notre champ
Doré par le couchant."

She was unaware that any eyes were watching her, unaware that this tiny incident — the singing of a love ballad — was to be the most important milestone in her life.

The quaint little Breton air sung by this girl to the stars caused the solitary guest at the Café Tardot to forget his cynicism, to forget that there was nothing to do, to forget Paris. He sat motionless, listening. It would no longer be necessary for him to wait and see what the morrow would bring forth.

"Sur la bruyère asseyons nous
Mon front sur tes genoux
Livre ta bouche à mes baisers
Les foins nous ont grisés . . ."

The words came faintly and more faintly. She had passed, and the road was empty. The only sound was the rumble of the sea. Suddenly a great beam of light flashed into the room and disappeared. The Gris Nez light had begun its work.

Leyden threw down his napkin and left the *salle-à-manger*. "Livre ta bouche a mes baisers!" he quoted. "By Jove! who knows . . .?"

CHAPTER IV

THE front door of the café opened and Leyden stood there framed in the doorway. Then he came out and leaned on the wooden railing of the steps, looking out into the darkness which was punctured here and there by tiny lights, some near, and some far, far away, mere pin pricks. The great lamp in the café threw the boy's shadow, all hunched and odd, on to the road, until the door swung slowly shut and blotted him out. He remained motionless while the revolving search-light crept across the country, picked him out for a second, and then left him in an even greater blackness than before.

The boy watched it circling relentlessly like some giant eye hunting for something that it could not find, round and round, and round again. It seemed to him to pause every time it found him on the step, as though he were the object of its search. At last it began to irritate him. There was a kind of accusation in the way it rested whitely on him.

"Damn the thing!" he muttered, "it gives me the jim jams."

He went down the steps and along the road, biting on his cigar, his hands deep in his pockets, looking about him restlessly. Everything he wore was stamped with a strong personality. Little details caught your eye; such things as the arrangement of buttons on his coat, the way in which he knotted his tie and did his hair, the

The Hour of Conflict

pattern of his shirt, the design on his stockings. All these minute points appealed to you immediately. They were well thought out, right; and when coupled to his robust length and breadth, straight nose and large grey eyes, you approved of him at once. And yet, in spite of all these things, there was something about him which made you hesitate. Was it his manner? Was it the expression in his eyes? Whatever it was, it left you wondering. You couldn't be quite sure whether you liked him or not.

As he went along the lonely road with the sea mumbling to itself on the rocks below and the frogs madly croaking in the marshy pools on his right, this boy was in a very curious frame of mind.

He had come into the world unwanted, almost, as it were, the result of an accident. His mother refused to have anything to do with him from the moment of his birth, hating him for having given her so much pain and spoiled so many months of her life. She held that her husband had not kept faith with her. The marriage had been one in which love had no place. She was young and he was very old and it was a marriage of finance. She had far too much to occupy herself with to want children. She had never expected one. Why then should this surprising brat have been allowed to upset all her arrangements? It was unspeakable!

If his mother grudged him his existence, his equally amazed father looked upon him as an intolerable interference. The whole incident was very regrettable, but after all there it was! And he shrugged his shoulders and thought no more about it.

Whether the child lived or died was of small account. There was a nurse. She understood babies,—or she

The Hour of Conflict

was supposed to; otherwise, why were they paying her? The nurse, a crotchety, bad-tempered French woman who ought never to have had children under her care, caught the attitude of the father and mother and neglected the unlucky infant without any fear of consequences. She dangled the parents like a sword of Damocles over the boy's head, telling him what horrible things they would do to him if he were naughty. It was the quickest way she knew to stop him crying.

So Everard grew up. But for occasional frightened peeps over the bannisters, he hardly ever saw his father and mother, and if ever he was unlucky enough to meet them on the stairs, they either swept by without taking any notice, or looked at him curiously and flung him a word. When the time came for him to go to school, he was naturally sent to a good one. It would not have been the thing for a Leyden to go to the wrong place—and since he was a factor in their existence which had to be reckoned with sooner or later let him be at least civilised.

Everard had never felt any of that much-despised thing called home influence. The word "mother" meant only unpleasant things to him. He had never been "tucked up" at night; had never felt that last tender kiss which colours the whole of a child's days, the memory of which remains with him to the very end. He had never been able to sob out his troubles in two soft arms which held him tight and safe from all his fears. He had never romped and made noises about the house to his heart's content. There had never been a mother's knee at which to say his prayers at night. He had never heard of God, except as an expression of anger on the part of the butler. He knew nothing until he went to school, one of

The Hour of Conflict

the "best" schools; and there he learned many things not included in the curriculum, things which real mothers and fathers warn their children about and tell them how to avoid. He got through with some vestiges of self-respect left him because he had a habit of letting out right and left when things displeased him, and the fact that he was somewhat bigger than most boys of his age, helped him.

When he came home for the holidays with a new outlook upon life, he saw things going on in the house which puzzled him; and although at the time he did not understand, they remained in his memory. He heard his mother send the same maid out for drugs once and twice a week when to all appearances she was bright-eyed and well. He noticed that his father's hair changed colour at the roots and that he leaned more and more heavily upon his stick. Extraordinary people came in and out at all hours of the day and night, unpleasant looking men who left a smell of scent in the passages, women who wore wonderful clothes and laughed very loudly.

It was a strange medley of impressions that the boy got in that curious home which at times had a creepy effect, and he preferred being at school, where at least there were things to do and he could fend for himself. He took an impish pride in knowing the weak spots of every one of the masters with whom he came in contact and with infinite pains discovered to just what lengths he could go with each one. Among the boys he made few friends. They disliked his sarcastic tongue; and when he passed on to Oxford, as a matter of course, none of them looked him up. They were content to let him drop out.

When this important milestone in his life was reached,

The Hour of Conflict

Everard was about as complete a specimen of paganism as it was possible to find. Such religious teaching as the school gave seemed to him merely a confused jargon of nonsensical rubbish which no person of any intelligence could be expected to swallow. He had, of course, to sit through sermons Sunday after Sunday with the rest of the school, but God was far too abstractly and vaguely interpreted by the preachers even to touch the boy's imagination. He refused to believe that there might be a hereafter. Death was the end. Therefore, it seemed to him to be a good philosophy to get the best out of life as was possible, and not to waste time worrying.

He did not worry. He welcomed everything that came his way, got into the most extraordinary sets, and was mixed up in every subtle ingenious rag that occurred. He organised many "funerals" for others with effects that were startling, until at last the day came when he was informed by the authorities that Oxford would rejoice to be relieved of his presence during the rest of the current term and the whole of the ensuing one and that, in short, he could thank his gods that he was not sent down for good.

At the time Everard had shrugged his shoulders and smiled sarcastically; what did it matter? It was part of the game to be sent down. So he smilingly collected his books in mid-term and went home. There he remained just a week. By that time he loathed the people who came to the house and felt that if he didn't get away, something would happen. The atmosphere of the place filled him with impatience. He had met unhealthy people at Oxford, but as soon as they became too much of a good thing, it was always possible to get away from

The Hour of Conflict

them. At home there was no escape. They filled the house.

So Everard left a note saying that he had gone to Wimereux to work for his degree, and caught the Boulogne boat with a deep breath of relief at having left home behind. But now as the gravel crunched under his feet in the darkness there was no gladness in his walk. His shoulders sagged as though his mind were big with trouble. A wave of misery caught at his throat and engulfed him. The whole world was empty. He was alone. He had always been alone. There was not one living being whom he could call his friend, his pal, no one to whom he could talk utter rot and laugh with and be glad.

A shiver ran through him and he stopped on the crest of the hill listening to the frogs, as though from their ceaseless chorus he might draw some fellowship. What would he not have given for a brother or a sister at that moment! Far down below the tiny lights of Wimereux somehow brought Oxford to his mind. While there, he had taken it all in a very matter of fact way, but now he ached to be back in his barnlike college rooms. To have heard Big Tom suddenly boom out would have brought tears to his eyes, he was so strung up with emotion. God, why was he born? What was he there for? Suddenly he cleared his throat and gave a sort of bitter laugh and pulled himself together.

"Great Scott," he muttered, "what on earth's the matter with me? I feel as if the bottom had fallen out of everything. Is it too much whisky, or what is it?"

CHAPTER V

THE tide was out and a wide stretch of yellow sands, dotted here and there by smooth round rocks to which clung strands of seaweed, went on and on until it was brought up sharply by the fort of Ambleteuse. The sands made a valiant effort to climb up the sloping granite digue which divided them from the rush-covered dunes. Away out the sea shimmered and danced and a tiny dot from which floated a grey line of smoke on the horizon showed where the Channel boat was hurrying along.

From the Hotel Impériale, a great barrack-like building all green and white some ninety yards along the road from the Café Tardot, a causeway ran down to the beach. On it lay a fishing boat covered over by a tarpaulin, and the sand had edged its way up to the keel. A chain of footprints began at the boat, small, neat footprints clearly outlined. First they led down slantingly to the edge of the sea, then branched to the right and kept on and on until they caught up their maker, a girl, half-way to the fort.

She was walking quickly in a skirt cut well above her ankles. She wore no hat and her hair, parted in the middle, was coiled up behind and held by a black bow. She was beautifully built, tall, slim and well balanced. Her eyes were big and brown and there was a soft down on her cheeks like that which adds to the lusciousness of a ripe peach.

The Hour of Conflict

Her father, Hippolyte Guerchard, had two ideas in life. One was to get thin, the other was the happiness of his daughter Toinette. Monsieur Guerchard was the vast proprietor of what he called the Café Guerchard. It was really no more than a small drinking house patronised by labourers and cabmen. Perhaps his great corpulence was the cause of his magnifying it to the rank of Café as he magnified everything else,—gestures, voice, and the quality of the sonnets which he wrote in spare moments and recited with extraordinary vividness of hands. Toinette was the apple of his eye and every morning while he rocked the entire building in his panting efforts with a skipping rope to reduce his adipose tissue he asked himself what new little thing he could give her or do for her. The result was that Toinette, although of the same class as Marthe and Jeanne, was allowed to realise her dreams in the question of dress. She appeared always to be what Marthe called *endimanché*. Her shoes had buckles and high heels. Her stockings were almost silk and very openworked. Her frocks were made for her and tried on at least three times. Her blouses, before she appeared in them, might have been seen in the windows of the great shop in Boulogne marked “*dernier chic. 2of, 75.*”

But though her large father, whom she still called *petit père*, spoiled her, Toinette was not the happy girl he fondly thought her to be. There were times when in the secrecy of her little white bedroom her thoughts fluttered shyly to the gallant lover who should come to woo her. She told herself that she was already nearly nineteen and quite old and if no one came soon she would be getting lines on her face and losing her prettiness. At such moments her expensive frocks seemed drab and

The Hour of Conflict

futile and when she came down stairs fragrant and smiling, petit père, greeting her boisterously, never guessed that she had just washed away the traces of tears. French girls as a rule marry young and Toinette never faced the possibility of becoming an old maid. Marriage, happily, was absolutely certain, she thought, but when she knelt in front of the quiet altar in the little church at Ambleteuse where God seemed so very near, Toinette quite simply and naturally told Him all about it and asked that the certainty might be speedily accomplished.

As she made her way along the firm sands in the sunshine that morning her eyes were shining with excitement. A feeling had come over her that love would very soon take her by the hand. She could not explain it to herself. She did not try to. She just felt it and was glad. Her thoughts danced ahead into a rose-coloured future and the little song floated to her lips once more.

"Ma douce allons nous en tous deux
Le long des chemins creux . . ."

And then in the distance he caught sight of a big priest in soutane and shovel hat walking along the sands on the farther side of the little estuary which she had to cross by the bridge.

He took off his hat and waved to her. Monsieur l'Abbé Jean-Paul Guerchard who shepherded the inhabitants of Ambleteuse was Toinette's uncle, but unlike his brother he had not run to fat. He was tall, broad of shoulder, lean and athletic. His grey eyes looked you through and through and a little wrinkle at either side of his mouth was the result of an ever-ready smile.

The Hour of Conflict

Toinette crossed the bridge and joined him.

"Well, *mignonne*?" He placed a hand on her shoulder. "You look as if something nice had happened. Surely not another birthday yet?"

Toinette laughed and shook her head. "It was only the other day you gave me my beautiful rosary, and time doesn't fly as quickly as all that."

They fell in step and made their way towards the village.

"Tell me the good news then," said the Abbé.

Toinette spread her hands. "But there is no good news," she said. "I am only happy because . . . because . . ." She broke off and looked out over the sea. The little dot had grown to a big ship which left a stream of foam behind it.

"Because you are young," the Abbé finished for her, "and life is full of possibilities, eh? How is my brother?"

"What do you think?" said Toinette, laughing delightedly. "Some one has recommended vinegar. So *petit père* has bought several bottles and drinks some every morning after skipping."

The big priest threw back his head and his laughter made a seagull scream with fright. "Oh, but that is delicious!" he said. "And is the remedy successful?"

"Poor *petit père*. I am afraid not." Toinette shook her head.

"Well, and what of the season?" asked the Abbé. "Has it begun yet?"

"The trams have begun to run," said Toinette.

"And visitors?"

The girl's voice took a different tone. "Yes," she said shortly; "an Englishman at the Tardot."

The Hour of Conflict

The uncle's eyes turned to her face. He was puzzled by her change of voice. "Only one?" he asked.

"Yes," said Toinette, "and I hope he'll go away again."

The Abbé's brows met in a frown. "Why, my child. Has he been rude to you?"

"No," said Toinette, "but . . ."

"But what?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Tell me," insisted the Abbé gently.

Toinette turned her head away. "Marthe was carrying for him this morning and when I passed he stopped playing and looked at me . . . queerly. . . . He is very good looking."

The priest patted her hand and smiled. "Are not you also, mignonne? I am not the only man who would say so."

Toinette tossed her head. "He made me shiver," she said.

CHAPTER VI

LEYDEN rose from the depths of an armchair in the smoking-room of the golf club and dropped an ancient *Daily Mail* into it. The room was very large and light, two sides of it being entirely given up to windows looking on to the links and the sea, while a sort of watch tower had been thrown out at the end consisting of glass and low window seats,— which, though unfortunately too roomy for a tête-à-tête, made a charming nook for a mixed foursome tea. The architect, however, evidently a man of imagination and humour, foreseeing that the watch tower would inevitably be fought for, was determined not to let the winners have things all their own way. Accordingly he placed a wide veranda supported by white posts of the girth of a ship's mast all along the front of the club so that the foursome who secured the watch tower would be under the eye of everybody who, preferring the open air, remained outside.

An empty coffee cup and cognac glass and a pile of cigar ash would have conveyed the fact to any one who cared to notice it that the boy who was the sole occupant of the room was doing himself fairly well. He yawned profoundly and stretched, put on his cap and made his way slowly through the building and out to the caddy master's shed. It was empty. Leyden stood looking about him in the sun. A moment after the caddy master appeared at the doorway of a workshop on the left, glanced at him and came very slowly across.

The Hour of Conflict

He was a little person with a wonderful moustache, a pair of baggy French corduroys and a fluent vocabulary in English.

Leyden had taken an instant dislike to him for the reason that when he addressed the man in his own tongue he promptly replied murderously in English.

The dislike was mutual, for from that moment Leyden spoke only in monosyllables. This was a blow to the caddy master, as, being a very human person, he liked his knowledge of English to be appreciated at more than its worth. If you had expressed doubt as to the fact that he was a Frenchman he would have looked upon you as a brother.

As it was Leyden placed his franc upon the counter and waited silently for a caddy ticket. As there were no balls or sponges or any one of the implements essential to the Royal and Ancient on sale at that price it was obvious that a ticket was what he required.

But the caddy master was not the man to take that sort of treatment lying down. "A franc," he said, looking at it as if it were dirt. "But what can I get for Monsieur? . . . Balls are two fifty and three francs. Sponges are . . ."

Leyden looked at him. "Ticket," he said quietly.

The caddy master smiled. He was one up. "Ah, but yes. A ticket. Of course. 'Ere you are, sir."

Leyden took it quietly and left the shop. Through the grill door behind which the caddies peered like a row of monkeys of both sexes he caught sight of Marthe. "Come along to the first tee," he said.

The caddy master snorted. "Allez, allez!" he said, handing through the Englishman's clubs and talking so that he could hear. "Monsieur s'impatiente! Vite!"

The Hour of Conflict

Leyden smiled as he strolled down the yard and out on to the tee. They were all square. He waited, looking over the course whose bogey he was determined to beat until Marthe trotted round, the clubs clicking in the bag over her shoulder, a broad grin showing her delighted appreciation at the little sparring match with the caddy master.

"Why is it that he gets on your nerves?" she demanded cheekily.

Leyden took the driver which she handed to him and watched her pat the pinch of sand and perch his ball on it. "Little girls should be seen and not heard," he said. "That, I may tell you, is an English proverb which should have been drummed into you at an early age."

Marthe's eyes twinkled, but she said nothing. Leyden was addressing the ball.

The professional was busily engaged in teaching the rudiments of the game to a Frenchman who had turned up with a bag full of new clubs and a pair of patent leather boots with grey uppers. He had his work cut out and so Leyden was forced to go round by himself. If Marthe had not thoroughly amused him it is doubtful whether he would have played at all. But there was nothing much else to do and he found her all that she appeared to be, full of impish remarks and constant chuckles. Her keenness on the game was extraordinary and her knowledge of the links invaluable. She absolutely refused to let him use certain clubs for certain shots. He asked for an iron. She handed him the brassy.

"I said the iron," corrected Leyden.

Marthe still held out the brassy.

"Are you playing the game or am I?" asked Leyden.

The Hour of Conflict

"Do you know these links or do I?" demanded Marthe quickly. "It is too far for an iron, Monsieur."

Leyden glanced at the distant green and then faced the serious-eyed girl. "I will bet you fifty centimes I get there with an iron."

Marthe calmly placed the wooden club back in the bag and handed him the iron. "It is right that one should pay for one's experience," she said. "Allez donc!"

Leyden laughed and played a full iron shot cleanly and well. The ball soared away with a touch of wind behind it in a dead line for the pin.

"Good shot," said Marthe, "but . . ." She waited with profound calmness until the ball pitched, rolled and stopped—a good thirty yards short. "It will be a mashie shot now instead of a putt."

Her complete finality was irresistible. Leyden handed over the half franc with an exaggerated bow. "Permit me, Mademoiselle," he said, "to pay for my experience."

Marthe plucked up her apron, found a pocket in the folds of her skirt and thrust in the money. "If Monsieur has benefited as much as I have we are both pleased," she said.

"Tell me," said Leyden as they walked on, "do you remember seeing that lady pass while we were driving at the fifteenth tee this morning?"

"Lady!" sniffed Marthe. "And anyhow it was the sixteenth."

"Do you know who she is?" asked Leyden.

"Everybody knows who she is."

"I don't, or I shouldn't have asked you."

Marthe gave him the putter after he had chipped the ball on to the green with a mashie and moved to the

The Hour of Conflict

pin. There was a rigid silence while he took the line, settled his feet and body into putting attitude and finally missed the hole by six inches.

"Well?" said Leyden.

"You are down in five," said Marthe, moving away to the next tee box.

Leyden smiled. He decided that this was a most exceptional caddy. "I didn't ask you that," he said.

Marthe raised her eyebrows politely. "Monsieur was asking . . . ?"

"For information as to the demoiselle who caused me to miss my drive at the fifteenth — I beg your pardon, the sixteenth this morning."

The girl's frigidity melted. She struggled hard to prevent a smile. It was useless. She had to laugh. "Well, then," she said, "it was Toinette Guerchard."

Leyden repeated the name to himself softly. "Toinette," he said. "Toinette Guerchard . . . well?"

The wind was blowing Marthe's golden curls all over her face. She pushed them back with her hand. "What else do you wish to know?"

"Everything you can tell me," said Leyden.

"Mon Dieu! she is Toinette Guerchard. Un point, c'est tout."

"Not at all," said Leyden. "If any one were to ask me who you were I should not say Marthe, full stop, end. I should say Marthe's my caddy, aged about fourteen . . ."

"You would be wrong!" said Marthe.

". . . an ugly child whose tongue is three sizes too large but which, however, has a habit of shrinking just when you want it to wag . . ."

Leyden was interrupted by a shriek of laughter. "So

The Hour of Conflict

that when I ask you," he continued, "for information as to a certain young lady I don't want you to say Toinette Guerchard un point, c'est tout. Do you follow me?"

Marthe nodded. She eyed him silently for a moment. She was not a little jealous of the interest he displayed in Toinette.

"Well?" asked Leyden.

"Why does Monsieur wish to know all these things?" Leyden began to be a little impatient. When Toinette had gone by in the morning he had recognised in her the girl whose song had seemed to be the answer to his questionings. Marthe could tell him about her, and although he took her evasions and badinage with a smile of amusement he felt that his patience was beginning to wear thin. "Never mind why," he said. "Just tell me."

"Do you know the café down the road from the Tardot?" began Marthe.

"Devil take the café!" cried Leyden, really irritable. "Answer my question, you imp of darkness!"

Marthe flung out her hands. "But mon Dieu, what am I doing then? . . . Toinette lives there with her father, who is the patron. Have you seen him?" She made an enormous gesture to give some idea of his magnitude. "Toinette will one day be like that."

But Leyden was no longer listening. He was already in imagination at the Café Guerchard and there was an odd half smile in his eyes as he moved to the next hole. It had made Toinette shiver.

CHAPTER VII

MADAME TARDOT emerged from the back door of the café into the yard where a dog, chained to a straw-lined barrel, leapt up from scratching itself and wagged a stump of tail. Madame threw it a kind word, but did not pause. Her mind was elsewhere occupied. Although she had none of the accepted characteristics of an entomologist,—leanness of limb which betokens the capacity for speed, so necessary for the successful stalking of the wily moth, nor any of the paraphernalia for drugging the benighted insect when captured,—her plump hand held a butterfly net.

She waddled across the yard to where a ladder was slanted against the barn. She grasped the ladder firmly and went up rung by rung. It was no easy feat for a lady of her abdominal measurement, but she accomplished it with surprising agility. True, she rested for a moment panting when at the required altitude, but that was only to be expected.

On the top of the barn were a number of fat pigeons which lived in little square compartments built especially for them. An uneasy fluttering and general movement greeted the appearance of Madame at the top of the ladder. This increased when she began to call soft nothings to them, at the same time cautiously advancing her net.

“Venez donc mes petit amours,” she chirruped guilefully, running her eye over them for the most prepossess-

The Hour of Conflict

ing bird. "N' ayez pas peur! Pt! Pt! Pt! . . . Ah!"

She made a sudden lunge with the net at a fat brown and white which had blinked with a more sleepy eye at her than the others. But the bird stretched its wings and floated away to the extreme end of the roof.

"Ah! sapristi!" cried Madame, clinging to the top of the ladder, "méchants enfants! Vous n'écoutez pas votre maman qui vous appelle si doucement!"

She remained quite still and silent for almost a minute. The birds did likewise, as though hypnotised, their heads sideways, their beady eyes fixed on their "mamma."

Again the net made a pounce, this time without any preliminaries. It was successful. A blue bird met its fate. Madame steadied herself by leaning against the ladder. Then she drew the captive slowly down the roof until she could reach up with her other hand.

"What a beautiful fate!" she murmured to it consolingly as she inserted her hand into the flapping net and caught the bird by its feet. "To be dressed by my own hands, cooked to a turn and eaten by a fine young English sir! What poetry . . . Ah, do not struggle so, stupid one! imbecile! You make me lose patience!"

In the most expert manner Madame delivered the coup de grâce, watched mournfully by all its companions, and tucking the bird into the chest piece of her apron, slowly and carefully descended the creaking rungs of the ladder. The scratching dog leaped on his chain and wagged his stump of a tail once more. This time he was rewarded by a pat. Then Madame glanced a moment anxiously at the weather and went again through the back door and closed it behind her.

Her anxiety was not misplaced. The wind veered round

The Hour of Conflict

late in the afternoon and with an uncanny swiftness great clouds of mist rolled up from the sea. The Café Tardot disappeared at the same instant as the more expensive Hotel Impériale. A moment later the road, the links and the club house, were all blotted out. The soft, wet sea fog enveloped everything. The country was like a woman who hides her face behind a thick veil. A noise which made your soul shudder began to come at intervals from the far distance,—a prolonged wail, an agonised cry for those in danger upon the sea.

When Leyden sat down to dinner in the salon the fog siren was still sending forth its sorrowful cries, and the searchlight of Gris Nez,—in clear weather a great white arm sweeping in circles on sea and land,—had become a mere feeble glimmer. The noise bored Leyden. He wished it would shut up and was exceedingly grateful for the fire which the servant, on Madame Tardot's instructions, had lit.

"Will Monsieur have coffee to-night?" asked the girl.

"No, thanks," said Leyden. He rose as soon as the door was shut and smoothed his hair in front of the big mirror with the unfortunate crack. The collar was all right, but the tie . . .! He tore it off with an exclamation.

He went up to his bedroom and pulled open the wardrobe. By the light of a candle he roused about in a bundle of ties, finally selecting a mauve with white spots. He did it into a butterfly with extreme care, filled his case with cigarettes and went downstairs and out into the street. The fog was still thick and the lights of the café made faint yellow blurs. In addition to the cry of the siren which came intermittently, Leyden was

The Hour of Conflict

struck by an extraordinary increasing sound like the rattle of trucks hydraulically pulled in a stone quarry. He wondered whether a boat were ashore, or whether some factory a mile or so away were doing overtime. For some minutes he could not place it at all. Then he suddenly remembered that Madame had explained how the frogs sang in the marshland outside her house in sign of good weather.

Meanwhile he made his way along in the direction of Wimereux until more yellow blurs in the mist appeared at the side of the road. Leyden tiptoed to the window and peered in. Through a chink in the blinds he could make out the counter of a café bar, green-painted walls with pictures of Quinquina and Dubonnet, a sanded floor with spittoons here and there under the two or three tables.

Leyden pushed open the door and went in. In that small drinking house the rather elaborate young Englishman with plastered hair and a bow tie seemed curiously incongruous as he peered round quickly with a touch of excitement. "Looks like a coffee stall on the Embankment," he thought, "probably kept by some unspeakable ruffian. Fancy *her* living here!"

He shut the door noisily and advanced to the bar. There came the scrape of a chair from an inside room, the door leading to the rest of the house was flung open and the patroni, Hippolyte Guerchard, entered.

So *this* was her father, thought Leyden, looking at the large bearded man with the twinkling eyes and tousled hair. Everywhere he was fat — hands, arm, face, neck and body, but the expression in the eyes was simple and honest. Monsieur Guerchard bowed profoundly. "Bonsoir Monsieur," he said. "Wimereux is treating you

The Hour of Conflict

to one of her petulant moods to-night." He pulled out a chair from one of the little tables and placed it for his guest.

Leyden's eyes moved from the man to the door by which he had entered. Was Toinette in there? He took the chair and sat down. "Will you join me in a coffee and cognac, Monsieur?" he asked.

Guerchard bowed again and spread his hands. "Monsieur is too charming," he said. "It will be a pleasure to take coffee with you. But cognac, alas, no!" He indicated himself with a gesture. "It is difficult to rid myself of all this superfluity even though instead of cognac I drink vinegar."

"Is vinegar any good?" asked Leyden.

Guerchard threw up both hands and wagged his head. "It is now a week since I have been trying it. The result is not as perceptible as I would have wished nor is the liquid to my taste, but . . . du courage n'est ce pas?" He went behind the counter and produced two cups and saucers and a small tray piled up with slabs of sugar which he placed by Leyden's elbow. Then he filled a glass of cognac and brought that across. All the time he poured forth a tale of the woes of obesity, gave an imitation of how he skipped in the early morning, which made the entire floor quiver and the cup clatter in its saucer, and went into roars of laughter at his own descriptions.

Leyden was highly amused at this giant baby who revealed his innermost secrets with such delightful ingenuousness. Had any one else detailed his ills and ailments at such length he would have been bored to desperation. But Guerchard was different. He illustrated, gesticulated, amused his hearer in spite of himself and

The Hour of Conflict

made him forget that he was still being kept waiting for coffee until he suddenly broke off in a burst of laughter and a look of intense dismay came into his face. "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" he cried. "Where is then your coffee? A thousand pardons." He hurried to the inner door and opened it. "Toinette! Mignonne! Coffee quickly for two. I have kept Monsieur waiting these five minutes."

Leyden sat up quickly in his chair. "Would not Mademoiselle also honour us with her presence?" He put the question very quietly, but Guerchard did not see him finger his tie.

The fat man turned. "The angel in my house!" he said. "The apple of my eye. The consolation of my days! What should I do without my little girl? Monsieur has not perhaps seen her? Her beauty is exceptional . . . of a kind that is not seen every day. Since Monsieur is so kind as to extend his hospitality to her I will go and ask her." He turned at the door and nodded. "Monsieur has a treat in store for him."

Leyden smiled. The fates were favouring him. If the father was more or less an intimate friend in ten minutes why should it take very much longer to know the girl? He could hear two voices in the inner room,—the great rolling voice of the father and the other a girl's. Leyden listened with all his ears.

"The coffee is all ready, petit père," said the girl.

"Bon! But you must come also. The Monsieur has invited us both."

"Who is he? the monsieur!"

"An Englishman, charming, delightful, witty. Come!" The door swung to. The voices fell away to a murmur.

Leyden chuckled. Seeing that it had been impossible

The Hour of Conflict

to get in a word edgeways this flattering description of his qualities smacked of poetic license.

There was silence for a moment. Then the girl said, "But petit père, I am not en tenue!"

"La! La! La!" said Guerchard. "You are always en tenue, chérie. En tout cas ce n'est pas le Président de la République!" The remark was followed by a roar of laughter which drowned anything the girl might have said and a moment later Guerchard came back into the café.

Toinette followed him carrying the coffee.

Leyden immediately rose to his feet.

Guerchard placed one arm round the girl's shoulder as she set the coffee down upon the table. "Monsieur. . ."

"Leyden," said the Englishman.

Guerchard bowed and spread out a massive left arm. "Monsieur Leyden," he said, "this is my heart and my life, my daughter Toinette."

No one at Oxford would have believed that it was the Leyden they knew, the "Disbelieving Jew," who bowed profoundly to the daughter of a French publican as though it were the biggest moment in his life.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I am honoured by your consenting to have coffee with Monsieur your father and myself."

Toinette felt her heart beating quickly. The look which had made her shiver was no longer there and he was indeed most polite.

She had never met any one of the class of this Englishman. Her father's friends were honest bourgeois whose hands were none too clean and whose outlook upon life was bounded on every side by their work, whose leisure moments were filled up with petits verres and dominoes

The Hour of Conflict

and much talk. This quiet Englishman, not so very much older than herself, who listened all the time to her father but who, when he looked at her, made her cheeks grow hot and her eyes fall before his, came from another world than the one she knew. He played golf and did no work. Therefore he must be rich. She liked the way he spoke her language, with every now and then a trace of foreign accent.

While petit père and the Monsieur Anglais talked and laughed, Toinette noticed how differently he stirred his coffee and drank it, how well his clothes fitted, how polite he was — asking her permission before lighting a cigarette. None of petit père's friends did that. Her eyes, fixed resolutely on her cup, took in every detail of his appearance. She had told her uncle that she did not like him. She made up her mind then and there that she would take the first opportunity of walking again to Ambleuse and telling him she had been too hasty in her judgment, that in fact she did like him.

No one came into the café. The weather was too bad for any one to venture forth unless compelled to do so. The two men discussed politics, the possibility of war — upon which Guerchard, it appeared, had written many stanzas of immortal verse which he stood up and recited for the edification of his guest — and a hundred other topics. But although Toinette occasionally went into ripples of laughter, Leyden's attempts to bring her into the conversation were unsuccessful. Her personality was drowned in that of her enormous father.

At last Leyden rose to take his departure.

Guerchard wrung him by the hand and expressed his hope that the Englishman would consider the café and its inmates at his entire disposal.

The Hour of Conflict

Toinette gave her hand to the Englishman for a moment and their eyes met.

"To the pleasure of meeting you again, Mademoiselle," said Leyden.

The phrase was purely conventional but to both those young people it meant more. Leyden wanted to hear her sing again and Toinette had an odd feeling that he had come into her life by the design of the good God.

The Englishman went out into the fog and the door closed behind him. Guerchard began clearing away the cups and saucers, noisily, blowing out swirls of smoke from his enormous cherry-wood pipe.

Toinette stood quite still, her eyes on the door.

CHAPTER VIII

BY the end of the next week Leyden was in that frame of mind which makes a man use strong language at the most trifling annoyance. Everything seemed wrong. The sun, when it did shine, was a weak and watery affair, his game had gone to the dogs, there was no one to play with, the pro was never free till after five o'clock. Marthe was getting too cheeky and life was just one blamed thing after another.

He totted up all these items and told himself that they were enough to make any Christian a heathen; but what he did not admit to himself, however, was the real reason of his temper; the apparent impossibility of getting Toinette to himself. He made a nightly habit of dropping into the Café Guerchard for his after-dinner coffee, but he had been only once rewarded by a word with the girl. The fat patron, who looked upon the Englishman's visits as a compliment to himself, recited the vast bulk of his poems to a man who listened with one ear and one eye on the inner door. Leyden began to loathe Guerchard's egotism. He thought that what sonnets he did hear were complete rot and while the phrases and stanzas rolled off the giant's tongue, he was concocting impossible schemes for getting a half hour with Toinette.

He pumped Marthe again and found out from her that Toinette made frequent visits to her uncle, the curé of Ambleteuse. From that moment he decided to change his plan of campaign.

The Hour of Conflict

He did not bother about analysing his feelings with regard to the girl. She was very pretty and attracted him vastly, therefore he wanted to know her, to make her laugh and talk, to see her in whatever moods and tenses she possessed. It was impossible to bring this about in the café,—her father had several yards too much tongue. Therefore he would stroll over to Ambleteuse and interview the uncle,—probably a weedy old man who spent his time telling his beads. He would certainly try and ram his religion down Leyden's throat, but the boy told himself with a laugh that he would soon settle his hash if he did.

He came to this decision one morning in bed while enjoying the few blissful minutes before turning out. Breakfast over, he sallied forth and made his way along the beach to the little village on the other side of the fort with its shuttered hotels, upturned boats and closed bathing cabins. Chalets, empty and jalousied, added to the note of melancholy of the place. A few children played about in the streets crying to each other shrilly. The scattered shops were certainly open, but the proprietors smoked cigarettes with each other as though certain that a customer, other than the permanent villagers, was an impossibility.

Leyden, as he walked down the streets, provided them with a new topic of conversation. He was so palpably English, so palpably new and strange and affluent, that they perked up and began to wonder whether the season had at last begun. Rumour had it that the train had begun to run between Wimereux and the golf club. They decided that he had come by it and indulged in speculations as to where he was staying.

Quite unconscious of the excitement he was causing

The Hour of Conflict

Leyden wandered along looking idly about him until the table outside a café reminded him that he was hot and thirsty. He sat down and ordered beer.

“Where does Monsieur le Curé live?” he asked.

The waiter flung out an arm. “Là bas,” he said, “but it is now five minutes only that I saw him go down towards the seashore. Monsieur will find him?”

Leyden nodded.

“Continue along this street and in a dozen paces you will arrive at the shore. Then you cannot miss Monsieur l’Abbé,” he smiled and wagged his head as if he had made an excellent joke.

“Why not?” asked Leyden.

The man spread himself and showed his teeth. “Because he is of a bigness . . . un Hercule!”

Leyden gave the man a franc pourboire, was rewarded by an amazing series of bows and scrapings, and continued his way through the village until he came at last to the seashore again, the dozen paces developing into a quarter of a mile. The yellow sands stretched away to the right and the only figure in the landscape was that of a priest who read his breviary as he walked slowly along.

Leyden stood still for a moment looking at him in surprise. Instead of the weedy old white-haired man he had expected to find, he saw a youngish man, who stood at the very least six feet in his socks, and who was broad in proportion. His cassock was shiny and worn in places and he was carrying his hat under his arm, allowing the sun to shine full upon his face. Leyden noted the determined jaw of the man and wondered exceedingly why such a useful specimen had wasted himself by becoming “a religion-monger.” He failed to see the point.

The Hour of Conflict

With a face and physique like that he might have done big things ; and yet here he was pottering about in a dead and alive seaside village ! It was amazing.

The priest on his side remembered the odd attitude of his niece when she had told him about the golfing Englishman. He decided that this must be the man and eyed him keenly to see why the girl had been alarmed. When Leyden raised his hat and gave him good-day, therefore, the priest bowed and stopped, a mixture of interest and cold politeness.

They were a curiously contrasted couple, these two,—the one with the worn, workaday clothes of sombre black, unrelieved except by the tiny row of white beads round the edge of the rabat at his chin, a man whose whole existence was the abnegation of self ; the other with beautifully cut expensive tweeds, coloured silk tie, silk socks, much brogued golf shoes, the very personification of twentieth-century civilisation, whose life was the cult of self,—the one simple with the clear outlook of a man who recognises truth and lives for it, the other sauntering unconcernedly, thoughtlessly, along the line of least resistance without ever having faced himself up with facts,—the one steering a steady course to a certain harbour, the other, rudderless and anchorless, drifting in whatever direction the wind blew at the moment.

The Abbé was wondering what manner of man stood up inside those immaculate garments when Leyden, with the most bland of smiles, asked if he had not the pleasure of addressing Monsieur l'Abbé Guerchard.

The priest's eyebrows struggled not to move, but they went up irresistibly. How did this stranger know his name ?

The Hour of Conflict

Leyden explained that he had been permitted to sympathise with the priest's brother on his increasing corpulence and that moreover he had been able to recommend a more pleasant and efficacious remedy than vinegar.

The Abbé held out his hand, his eyes twinkling merrily. "You must indeed be a good friend of his," he said. "Allow me to consider you as my friend also."

Leyden's fingers tingled with the strength of the priest's grip. "That is very kind of you," he answered. "I should like nothing better. Suppose we sit down? . . . That is if you are not busy?"

The priest flung down his hat and sat on the sand beside it.

"Have you walked over here to have a look at my beautiful village?" asked the Abbé.

Leyden produced his cigarette case and held it out. "No," he said. "I came because I wanted to have a look at you."

Both men laughed. The Abbé was delighted at the Englishman's frankness. It was so completely unexpected. "Why?" he asked. "Did you think you were going to see some sort of freak?"

"No," said Leyden. "As a matter of fact I expected to find you a charming old man with white hair and a senile smile."

L'Abbé Guerchard shook with laughter. "But this is delicious," he said. "Why again?"

"Oh, I dunno," said Leyden. "I rather got the idea into my head somehow that all French priests were old and white haired."

"And senile?" The priest's grey eyes fixed him.

The boy shrugged his shoulders. "Yes," he said.

The Hour of Conflict

"If you insist." He made the admission with a smile that took out all the sting.

The Abbé looked at him with a twinkle of amusement. "Because a man chooses to wear a soutane and try and look after other men's souls as well as his own you think he must necessarily be a brainless imbecile?"

Leyden looked out to sea and blew several little funnels of smoke through his nose. "Must I answer that?" he said.

The Abbé smiled and flung out his hands. "You have already answered," he said, "by your refusing to do so."

Leyden laughed. "Very well," he said. "I do think it seems rather a waste of time,—but not in your particular case."

"Oh, Monsieur, do not trouble to make excuses. . . ."

"I'm not making apologies or compliments," said Leyden. "What I mean is this that a man like you would be of more use if you were not planted here like a cabbage. I think any fool can be a priest. You don't strike me as being a fool."

The Abbé remained silent for several moments. The sea shimmered and danced in the sun, making little whirlpools and gurglings as it advanced upon the rocks, enveloped them and then receded for a moment as if to see what effect it had made.

This Englishman was of a frankness that was monumental, pyramidal! "You do not belong to any church in your country?" asked the Abbé, at last.

Leyden shook his head. "I had to keep chapels at Oxford," he said drily.

"Do you believe in God?"

Leyden shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I don't know that I've ever thought about it," he said. "I suppose

The Hour of Conflict

there is a God or Something,—but the whole thing is quite impersonal to me. I get along all right without God, so I don't bother."

The priest nodded. "I see," he said. "I've heard that point of view many times before. And because we priests bother to the extent of devoting our lives to the question, we are fools, eh? Well, well! Perhaps one day you will wonder that you were once so foolish as to hold the views that you have just put forward. . . . Will you not come and share my déjeuner with me. It is late and you will never get back in time."

"Oh, that is most kind of you, but . . ."

The big Abbé put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "I can offer you some sardines, a fine salad from my garden, as much cider as you care to drink, and an infinite amount of discussion to give you the necessary thirst."

Leyden's half refusal was merely a matter of form. He had intended to work an invitation to lunch if possible. So he accepted the more readily because there had been no question of hinting.

He had started out with the idea of cultivating the Curé of Ambleteuse, whatever sort of a man he might be, simply because he was Toinette's uncle and it might enable him to meet her away from the café. He found now that the priest interested him more than he would have thought possible. If he had not taken an instant liking to him he would never have expressed himself so freely. He felt that he wanted to see more of him. It was good to have some one to talk to and this man Guerchard apparently liked one to speak out,—and what was more to the point, he showed no hankering to emphasise his religion.

"Do you have work to do after dinner as a rule?"

The Hour of Conflict

he asked suddenly after they walked some distance up the street in silence.

"Sometimes," said the Abbé. "Not often." He received an elaborate salutation from the café waiter and the children who were still playing in the street ran up to him and smiled a bonjour.

Leyden watched the big man pat their cheeks and fish in his great pocket for sous with a wonderful smile wrinkling the corners of his eyes. Mothers came to the doorways and called out respectful greetings and the Abbé hatted them one and all. Everybody had a word for him. Everybody was pleased to see him. Leyden began to think that perhaps after all he was not a cabbage.

"Why do you ask?" said the Abbé.

"I was wondering whether you would permit me," said Leyden, "to come sometimes in the evening and smoke a pipe with you?"

There flashed into the big priest's mind a sudden quick question. Might it not be given to him to bring this Englishman to the realisation of God? With a word here and a word there dropped in season . . . who could tell? "Bring your largest pipe when you come," he replied, "and if you like you can find a place for it on my mantelpiece."

He had forgotten that this was the man who had made Toinette shiver.

CHAPTER IX

MAY slipped quietly into June and though Leyden's golf showed signs of great improvement and he became more and more sunburned, the many law books upon which he was supposed to be working had not yet been opened. Incidentally he had earned for himself a new name,—two new names. The good people of Ambleteuse who now had always a smile for him knew him among themselves as "l'ami anglais de Monsieur l'Abbé." It was a very customary thing to see the two marching in step, towels over shoulders, down to the seashore, and it was the waiter at the café who first offered small odds on the Englishman's being the better swimmer. He found many takers and a small boy was deputed to conceal himself and watch who swam out the farthest. The lad, torn between his liking for the newcomer and the priest, returned with a wonderful story of their both having been almost to England and back—right out of sight, pardi!—and was inconsolable because he thus failed to earn the promised sou.

The other name was given to him by Marthe. Her parents lived next door to the café in Ambleteuse and she had been puzzled to see the man for whom she caddied come out of the Abbé's house late in the evenings. Her small brain instantly became busy, and though she said nothing to any one—not even to Jeanne, her particular friend, she decided to keep an eye on Monsieur l'Anglais! It might be useful. The result of her ob-

The Hour of Conflict

servations was that "Monsieur l'Anglais," as she used to call him, changed to "l'ami de Toinette."

There were many hiding places in the dunes along the shore from Ambleteuse to the Café Tardot and the innocent-looking, elfin-like caddy seemed more than ever a sprite as she wormed her way through the rushes and peered into hollows. The fact that eavesdropping is a very particular crime had not been included in her education, and the consequence was that when one day her snake-like crawlings were rewarded by suddenly coming upon Toinette and the Englishman among the dunes she lay flat with a silent exclamation of joy and a gleam in her eyes and watched.

It happened that this was their first meeting away from her father's café. Leyden had bathed in the morning with the big priest and as they were about to sit down to lunch Toinette had walked in. There was surprise and confusion in every line of her face when she saw the Englishman. Had she not walked over to see her uncle in order to tell him that she had altered her uncharitable opinion about him?

"Ah ha! mignonne!" cried l'Abbé Guerchard, "this is delightful. Monsieur Leyden, let me present you to my niece Toinette."

Leyden bowed and took the girl's hand. "Mademoiselle and I are already friends, I hope," he said.

Toinette looked from him to her uncle who was watching with a smile. "But yes," she said and added quickly, "Monsieur has been good enough to listen to my father's poetry."

Leyden brought a chair for her to the table.

During the meal both men did their best to make the girl laugh and talk,—the Abbé from affectionate pride

The Hour of Conflict

and Leyden because this was the moment he had been waiting and working for.

It was a merry lunch and when finally the Abbé rose and announced that he had duties to perform, Leyden offered to escort Toinette back home.

Alone with a "beau jeune homme" for the first time in her life Toinette became very silent. Her laughter and high spirits left her and she was shy and nervous. It was a new and very exciting experience and she was not quite sure what her father would say when she told him. But before they had crossed the little wooden bridge she asked herself why should she tell him? Her uncle knew and approved and he was an Abbé! No, she would not tell.

Leyden, walking at her side and talking vividly, knew nothing of the little struggle that was going on inside her, nor of the decision at which she finally arrived. All he did know was that when she agreed to his proposal to rest for a few minutes among the dunes she was the sweetest girl he had ever met, and he congratulated himself on what he called the avuncular attack having come off.

They had not been there more than half an hour when Marthe's impish face appeared cautiously between two tufts of rushes.

Toinette was helping herself laughingly to a chocolate from a box which Leyden produced from his pocket. Their heads were very near together.

"Ah!" murmured Marthe to herself, "it's like that, is it?"

At once she found the explanation of all the questions as to the whereabouts of the Abbé Guerchard which Leyden had put to her and she suppressed a gurgle of

The Hour of Conflict

delight. What fun she would have the following morning when carrying for the Englishman! How she would mystify him with her hints and blagues!

Side by side on the sand, the sea sparkling before their eyes in the sunshine, and all unconscious of being spied upon, the boy and girl discovered each other.

Everard Leyden had considerable experience of the other sex. He had answered to the call of "Evvy dear" at the Piccadilly Hotel more times than he could remember. At Skindle's many different voices had called him "Boy" affectionately, coyly or angrily. He knew those types of maiden to the very last letter. He knew the sort of things they said and did and liked. He knew just the kind of remark which would make them purr or scratch—and it gave him a certain sarcastic pleasure to make them do one or other just when it appealed to him. He played them just as the small coster boy plays a cheap mouth organ.

He had expected to find that Toinette would prove to be of one or the other class. She showed her ankle with the exact amount of unconsciousness. She put refractory curls into place with the same preliminary expostulation, and she had all the appearance of being just the ordinary type of "little thing."

Within ten minutes, however, he acknowledged himself to be utterly and completely wrong. Remarks which had an instantaneous effect on the Skindle damsel left Toinette puzzled and wondering. She failed to understand them and Leyden found that she was new and fresh and different. She knew nothing and was to all intents and purposes a child. So he began again and said nonsensical things which set her off into peals of laughter. He told her all about London, drew sarcastic

The Hour of Conflict

pictures of people and things, and all the while watched with growing appreciation the wind stirring her hair and the graceful attitude she assumed in absolute unself-consciousness.

Toinette enjoyed an experience which was different from anything which had ever entered her life before. She laughed excitedly at every little thing although there was nothing humorous about it whatever. She chattered and gesticulated with an abandon which would have amazed her father or her uncle. She felt a sense of freedom, of having rounded a corner in her life. No one had ever listened to her before and all her little points of view on anything and everything had remained bottled up inside her. But the Englishman liked to hear them, and so Toinette, without realising that she was doing so let them come out with a rush and showed herself to him as she had never shown herself to any one else.

The minutes changed into half hours and hours and still the two sat on. The chocolates were all eaten, Leyden had emptied his cigarette case and Marthe had fallen asleep behind the tuft. The tide had gone right out before Toinette suddenly looked up quickly and realised how long they had been there.

She sprang to her feet and shook the sand from her frock. "Oh, mon Dieu!" she exclaimed. "How late it is getting. I must go, Monsieur."

Leyden rose slowly. "There were two fairies listening to you," he said. "You frightened them away by jumping up so quickly."

"I am sorry," said Toinette, "but the fairies will not get my father's dinner, will they? We must be quick."

"Come along, then," said Leyden, holding out his

The Hour of Conflict

hand, "we will run. Now then one . . . two . . . three!"

The girl gave him her hand with laughter in her eyes and together they clambered up the sandy hollow and slid down the other side, ankle deep, on to the half-finished digue and ran until their breath failed.

"Pouf!" said Leyden. "I can run no more. I am finished."

Toinette stopped, panting, and they walked along in step. Leyden did not let go her hand. He looked at her whimsically. "I am your father's friend and your uncle's friend," he said. "And this morning you called me your friend. Do friends call each other Monsieur and Mademoiselle?"

"In France, yes, Monsieur." Toinette laughed shyly and looked away. There was a pause. Then she added hesitatingly, "I do not know your petit nom."

"It is Everard," said Leyden.

Toinette remained silent and the boy felt her hand wriggle to free itself from his. He held it tight for a moment and then let it escape as they came up from the digue on to the road by the golf links.

Toinette gave a sigh and quickened her pace. "Do not come right back to the café with me," she said.

Leyden smiled. "Very well," he said, "but first, when can we have another talk? There are hundreds of things I want to ask and tell you. Will you come to the sand dunes to-morrow afternoon?"

Toinette looked away over the links. "I do not think I shall be able to," she said.

"Oh, but you must!" said Leyden. "This place is a desert without you, and there is not much time now before I must return to England."

The Hour of Conflict

Toinette's eyes returned from the links. "But suppose my father . . . ?"

"Surely he can spare you for another afternoon! Say that you will come . . . please!"

"Very well," said Toinette. "I will try."

"Thank you." Leyden spoke quickly and eagerly. "I shall be there at two o'clock waiting for you. C'est compris, hein?"

The girl hesitated and then nodded. "I will try," she repeated.

"A demain, Toinette." The boy held out his hand.

"Au revoir, Monsieur . . . Evérard." She released her hand and hurried away.

Leyden followed her with his eyes as he vaulted the railing on to the links and went slowly towards the club house. "Fancy her not looking back!" he murmured.

And among the dunes, a long way off, Marthe was at that moment stamping angrily and jealously on the empty chocolate box.

CHAPTER X

AT ten o'clock that night Leyden dropped his feet from the chair on which he had propped them and tossed the magazine which he had been reading on to the table. It was an old copy much battered, left by some previous visitor and probably read and reread since by every visitor to the café.

The place was very quiet. A low murmur of conversation from the back part of the house where Madame was discussing the daily paper with the little servant had the effect at first of making Leyden sleepy. After a while, however, it got on his nerves. He rose, opened the glass door leading to the bar and went through on to the steps outside.

The night was very dark, although the sky was a blaze of stars. The frogs sent forth their incessant hymn of praise with monotonous regularity and the beam of the distant lighthouse cut its way round and round in the blackness.

Suddenly the boy slipped quietly down the steps, leaving the door open behind him, and walked quickly along the road in his slippers. He made his way steadily forward until he came to the Café Guerchard. He stopped on the opposite side of the road and considered.

The place was in darkness downstairs and up. They had retired for the night.

Leyden tiptoed across and felt his way carefully round to the back. He was brought up by a low fence which

The Hour of Conflict

enclosed a kitchen garden. He leaned over and peered up at the windows. They were all shut and all dark.

Again he paused and considered. Then he cocked one leg over the fence and stepped delicately in between the rows of potatoes. He was prepared to bet that Toinette slept on that side of the house. For several moments he stood looking up. Then he turned up his collar so that the white linen beneath could not be seen and began very softly to whistle the air of the song he had heard on her lips.

*“Livre ta bouche à mes baisers.
Les foins nous ont grisés. . . .”*

He stood behind a bush with his hands in his pockets, watching intently and listening for the least movement within.

Nothing stirred.

He whistled the tune again slightly more loudly and again waited. A bird dropped out of a bush by his elbow with a sleepy, frightened shriek that echoed loudly through the night. Leyden ducked behind the branches expecting the entire place to be awakened.

Still there came no sign. He crept nearer and nearer to the house until he stood under the window. Then he picked up a small stone.

Crack! It struck the window pane sharply. Leyden's heart beat furiously. That must surely wake her. He waited, hardly daring to breathe. Everything remained quiet.

He picked up another stone and hit the window again. There came a faint sound from the room. Leyden slipped behind the bush and watched.

The Hour of Conflict

Suddenly the window opened wide and in a white cotton nightcap with a tassel that flapped from side to side there appeared the fat bearded head and neck of Monsieur Guerchard. He peered out right and left, staring into the blackness in a vain attempt to penetrate the mystery of the night.

Leyden remained motionless behind the bush, listening with intense amusement to the murmur which came from the publican's lips. "Sacré bon sang de bon sang! Did something hit the window or did it not? Did I suffer from nightmare or did I not? Sacré bon sang de bon sang!"

Inch by inch the boy edged his way to the potato patch farther and farther from the window and leaped noiselessly over the fence, leaving the sleepy patron still murmuring to himself. Then he walked round to the front of the café and studied the upstairs windows. One of them was open about an inch. He decided that it was the girl's.

Picking up a handful of dust he tossed it against the window pane and whispered her name, "Toinette!"

After a moment's interval the window went up.

Leyden moved on to the white road where he could be seen. "Toinette!" he breathed.

Toinette was gazing out, her hair hanging down in two long plaits, something dark round her shoulders. "Who is there?" she whispered. "What is the matter?" There was fright in her voice.

The boy noticed it. "It is all right," he said. "It is I—Everard. Were you asleep?"

There came a little gasp from the window and then Toinette replied shortly, "Yes."

"Why did you go straight back this afternoon without

The Hour of Conflict

looking round?" He could see her white arm on the window sill.

"Good night," whispered Toinette. The window went down an inch.

"Toinette!" The boy flipped his fingers impatiently. The window stopped. "Eh, bien?"

"Are you coming to-morrow afternoon?"

There was no answer, but he could see that she was still there. He spoke a little more loudly. "I shall be going away soon, back to England, and then . . ."

Toinette's head came out of the window. "To England? When?"

"All too soon," said Leyden. "Will you come to-morrow, Toinette?"

"Yes," said Toinette. "I will come. Good night."

Leyden made no reply, but he began to hum her little love song. He saw a white hand draw the curtain slowly across the window and disappear and then suddenly her father's voice boomed out.

"Are you asleep, Toinette?" The handle rattled and then the voice came from inside the room, petulantly and with some concern in it. "Why are you out of bed? Was there any one there? I thought I heard you speaking?"

Leyden stood motionless in the road listening for Toinette's answer.

Without a pause it came. "No, petit père. I did not speak. There was no one."

Leyden turned on his heel. There was a little smile of triumph on his face.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN a girl who has lived a lonely life suddenly finds herself singled out by a man who is extremely good-looking and extremely fluent, who pays her considerable attention and in the most natural manner in the world calls her by her Christian name inside of an hour — unless she is an abnormal creature lacking every emotion, her heart will undoubtedly beat the quicker. She will remember all the little meaningless things that the man has said to her and will weave subtle meanings round them. She will sit very still in her room, her eyes fixed on space, and live again the moments spent in his company. All her thoughts will be of him. He will inevitably become part of her life and being,—the most important part. In a word she will fall in love, and will rank that man above God in her heart. She will think nothing of misstating facts to shield him, of laying down her life for him.

Toinette was no abnormal creature. She was a girl of large heart whose emotions answered to the lightest touch. Until the coming of Everard Leyden her father and her uncle had been the only men in her life. It is no wonder, therefore, that her whole mental horizon speedily became overshadowed by the personality of the Englishman.

Until that night when he had spoken to her beneath the bedroom window she had not known exactly what her feelings were in regard to him. He was charming,

The Hour of Conflict

yes. She liked him; she thought him nicer, credited him with greater virtues than any man whom she had ever met. But she had not defined her liking for him.

When her father had entered the little white bedroom and caught her standing by the window, her cheeks flushed, her heart beating with excitement, she knew in one great flash that she loved him and she had lied for his sake with a readiness that afterwards made her give a little choky laugh of disbelief. It was not she who had lied. It could not be. She had never told a lie in her life. It was a new Toinette, a different girl, a girl who had grown up and whose whole point of view was changed, who had told that lie.

After her father had gone she got back into bed and lay there, her breast rising and falling quickly, her eyes sparkling. Evérard! She breathed his name softly. What an odd name — but tout de meme gentil! She was to meet him to-morrow! Would to-morrow never come! She tossed restlessly and then suddenly sat up and held her breath with clenched hands. He was going back to England soon. How terrible if he should leave her alone! What should she do if he went? And then she laughed. He would not go. He must not go. She loved him. She would prevent him from going. It would be easy because he loved her. Of that she was certain. Had not his eyes expressed it a hundred times while they were talking? Was it not in his voice when he had whispered good night not an hour ago?

Yesterday she had been alarmed at what her father might think if she sat alone with the Englishman on the sands, and had only decided to do so after a struggle with her conscience. Now she lay in bed, utterly unable, indeed not wanting, to go to sleep again, and

The Hour of Conflict

the thought of her father's not liking her to meet Leyden never struck her. She was going to the sand hills. That was all. And since *she* considered it to be the proper thing, it was, it *must* be so.

The lie marked an epoch in her life. Before she had told it *petit père* had come first in all things. She had never done anything without asking his advice and consent. He had been the one to whom she turned instinctively in all her little troubles and difficulties.

Now it was different. He seemed to come under another focus. She was not going to ask his advice. She was going to act for herself. Her eyes had been opened and she was no longer a child. Everard came before anything and everything, and to-morrow . . . to-morrow she would not keep him waiting in the sand-hills!

Suddenly she flung the clothes back and sprang out of bed and, kneeling down beside it, buried her face in her hands.

The bon Dieu was very good.

CHAPTER XII

THE dunes were curiously shaped. It was as though a horde of workmen had been set to dig out enormous pits in the fine dry white sand and to sow what they threw out with lines of rushes. All that could be seen from the bottom of one of these pits was blue sky; and the sand was so fine that when you climbed down the steep sides you went in almost up to your knees and slithered down anyhow.

Toinette stood on the brink of the hole and glanced at her watch. She was early. Looking back towards the Hotel Impériale she could see no sign of any one coming, so she slid down, catching at tufts of rushes to prevent herself from falling. The sand filled her shoes. She took them off and emptied them. But she was still uncomfortable. The fine grains had filtered through her openwork stockings.

Toinette looked at her watch again. Yes. If she were quick there was time. She sat down and pulled off her stockings and shook them out, singing quietly to herself all the time. Her black hair was done in a different way and she was wearing a new blouse in which there were touches of red. It was evident that she had been at great pains to look her best and the result justified all her care. Toinette had never looked prettier.

She still sang as she pulled on one stocking and fastened it. But when the other was half on a queer feel-

The Hour of Conflict

ing that she was not alone made her suddenly stop and look up. There stood Everard with a cigarette between his lips and a look of great admiration in his face. As the girl looked up he flung away the cigarette and smiled down at her.

"I thought I was going to be too early," he said.

"You *are* too early," said Toinette. "Turn your back while I finish."

The boy laughed. "I obey your commands," he said, and did so.

Toinette hurriedly fastened the stocking and buttoned her shoe. "Bien!" she said. "You can come down."

Leyden slid down the slope, crossed over to her and sat beside her. "Eh bien, Toinette?"

"Eh bien, Evérard?"

"That is good," said Leyden. "Then we are still friends."

"Still friends? What do you mean?" Toinette's puzzlement was so intense that the boy laughed aloud.

"I thought you might have been angry at my waking you out of your beauty sleep last night," he said, lying down full stretch and looking up at her through half-closed eyes.

Toinette was sitting with her hands clasped round her knees. "I was very frightened at first," she said. "I could not think what it was."

"I am very sorry," said the boy. "Next time you'll know who it is, however."

"Oh, but you must not do it again," said Toinette. "Supposing my father found out?"

Leyden did not answer for a moment. He sat up on one elbow and met her eyes. "Would you tell him the same thing as you told him last night?"

The Hour of Conflict

Toinette shrugged her shoulders. "Yes," she said quietly. "Tell me," she went on; "you are not going back to England — yet?"

"I'm afraid I shall have to soon," said Leyden. "My people have written to know how much longer I intend to waste my time here."

"Your family . . . ça ne compte pas! You will not go yet, dites!"

Toinette leaned forward with a smile and made the remark in a tone which was intended to be one of pure chaff.

Leyden, however, saw that the smile did not get beyond her lips. Her eyes remained serious. He sat up and began throwing little handfuls of sand. "I have written to say that I will return next week," he said.

Toinette turned her face away. Her chin propped on one hand, her elbow on her knee.

Leyden threw several more handfuls of sand and then looked up at the girl, surprised at her silence.

"Eh bien?" he said.

The girl did not move.

Leyden leaned towards her, took her hand and pulled it away and slid his other arm round her. "Eh bien, Toinette?" he repeated softly.

For a second he felt her strain away and then her body relaxed as she turned to him and burst into a passion of weeping with her face hidden on his chest. The boy was staggered. He stroked her hair and called to her soothingly with something of fright in his voice at her violent emotion. Gradually her sobs grew more quiet and Everard felt a shiver go all through her. Then at last she raised her head and looked at him for a long moment. Two tears still lay on her lashes like

The Hour of Conflict

dewdrops. The boy held her tight and their lips met. Toinette slid her arms round his neck, her hair brushing the boy's cheek. "Évérard," she murmured, "tu m'aimes, hein? Say that you love me?"

For answer the boy kissed her eyes and neck and hands and held her to him.

"Dis moi!" she said again.

"I love you!" said Everard. "Toinette! Ma Toinette, je t'aime!"

The girl gave a deep sigh which ended in a little choky laugh and held out her arm. "Hit me," she said. "I do not think that this can be really true! Mon Dieu! I am too happy!"

Never in his life had Everard known such a moment. The times when he had kissed in backwaters below Maidenhead had been very different affairs, unreal, unmeant, just to pass the time. Toinette was so different, so clean, so fragrant. The touch of her hair on his face held him silent, almost breathless.

And Toinette? The two tears had dried and the whole world was one great song of joy in time to the beats of her heart. Nothing mattered now that she knew. Of course she had known before,—since last night. But now she knew absolutely, beyond any question. Everard loved her and she loved Everard. Everything else was blotted out,—uncle, father, England. There was nothing but the present, no past and no future, just those wonderful minutes when his arms held her captive, when his lips touched hers and drank her very soul away.

There had been no mother to tell this child the meaning of love and marriage. They were two beautiful mysteries, containing such happiness as no other mys-

The Hour of Conflict

tery upon earth. They were something to be waited for, prayed for,—a foretaste of heaven which coloured all the remaining years of life with gold. She had heard vaguely that men were wicked, oh, la, la! and that sometimes they did not marry the girl to whom they had made love. But it was all very vague and difficult to understand. To her there could be but one ending to a passionate kiss and a declaration of love,—marriage bells.

Already, as the two lovers sat under the blue sky oblivious of time, she could hear them faintly in the distance ringing out from the little church in Ambleteuse. She could almost see the candles on the altar and smell the incense as her uncle the Abbé joined their hands and called down upon them the blessing of God with all the guests and the villagers kneeling round.

“Tu es contente?” said Everard.

Toinette placed her hand gently over his lips and smiled up at him. “Do not speak,” she said. “I am too happy.”

CHAPTER XIII

EVERARD LEYDEN went to bed that night with very mixed feelings. He had arrived in France in a very restless and cynical frame of mind. The whole world was wrong and rotten to the core and the loneliness of the place had not seemed to show any promise of taking him out of himself.

Toinette had literally appeared on the horizon as the sole distraction. He had looked forward to indulging in a rapid flirtation with a pretty girl, snatching a kiss or two and thus helping to kill the boredom of an empty seaside place.

But as he stood in the bedroom with its plain walnut furniture dimly lit by a small oil lamp which smelt abominably, a change seemed to have taken place in him. He was leaning out of window in his shirtsleeves gazing across the links, black and misty under innumerable stars. The smoking lamp was unnoticed and he remained very still.

The bored cynicism was gone. His eyes were glowing and his hands gripped tightly together. The perpetual cigarette was in the corner of his mouth, but no films of smoke curled from its tip. He had forgotten to light it.

Everard was once more on the sand dunes. He could still feel the pressure of her lips, the warmth of her as she nestled in his arms. "I love you," he murmured. "Mon Dieu que je t'aime!"

The Hour of Conflict

And after a long pause he suddenly stood upright with a deep sigh and found that his cigarette was not alight and that the lamp was smoking.

The affair was no longer a mere flirtation. Toinette was not the girl from whom one snatched a kiss, and then forgot. Toinette was not an ordinary girl at all. She was extraordinary, amazing, a worker of miracles. So extraordinary was she and so wonderfully had she affected the boy that although he had only twice had her to himself, the realisation of love had been as it were dragged from him, surprised out of him, at their second meeting. She had transformed Wimereux from a dull hole into the only place on earth in which he desired to be. She had changed him from a mere philanderer into a passionate lover, from a young prig into an earnest man who sincerely felt that although she was to all intents and purposes a barmaid, the daughter of a publican, he was not good enough for her. She was so fragrant in mind and body that for the first time in his life he regretted some of the things that he had done. They were not fair to her. They placed him so far beneath her that it would be almost impossible to work back to anything like her level. But she loved him. That redeemed him of a great deal.

And then a wave of practicality engulfed him. What about money? He had only what his father allowed him and with a smile of bitterness he reflected that it would be stopped at once if any hint of the affair reached his ears. Neither would his mother have any sympathy for him. For her son to marry beneath him would be anathema, unheard of! What was he to do?

He would earn money! He would show them that he was not a weakling. He would be independent,—

The Hour of Conflict

a man. There were thousands of ways in which to make an income. He assured himself with youthful optimism that with a public school and university training behind him there was nothing he could not do, no job which would not be glad to welcome him. Then as he undid his tie and took off his collar he laughed a little. Lord! how he was anticipating. Why dash it, all that sort of thing was for the remote future. It was absurd to worry about it now when he had only just found such happiness. What was the good of spoiling the all too short time still left?

He kicked off his shoes noisily, determined to thrust everything behind him and enjoy the present to the full, and as he turned out the lamp and sprang into bed in the darkness he began to hum the air of Toinette's song.

When everything goes right it is so easy to be scornful of relying on any strength but one's own, and so, unlike Toinette, who saw the hand of the "bon Dieu" in everything that happened, Leyden went to sleep that night like a young animal with simply a deep sigh of content and a relaxing of all muscles. He had told the Abbé Guerchard that God didn't matter—he had always got along without a God, so why should he bother?

But was it not possible that God had a point of view?

CHAPTER XIV

DURING the week that followed the lovers met daily at the sand dunes. Toinette confessed with a chuckle of excited glee that she had been forced to invent intricate but plausible reasons for this sudden great fondness of hers for open air in order to satisfy her father's curiosity. But as she was the apple of his eye and nothing gave him greater pleasure than seeing her happy she found it easy, far easier than she would have believed possible, to invent different excuses for each day.

Not a soul knew that she met the Englishman from the Café Tardot. Her father believed that she went bathing or visited the Abbé at Ambleteuse and each evening on her return with a glowing light in her eyes and a joyous song on her lips he asked her whether she had become a mermaid yet or whether the Abbé had given her any answer to the message he had sent. Toinette, struggling hard to remember what the message was, invented what she believed would be the sort of thing her uncle would have replied had she really spoken to him and the fat café-keeper was completely satisfied.

They congratulated themselves upon having successfully kept their meetings absolutely secret. They made a point of arriving at the rendezvous from opposite directions and then not at the same time and they were never disturbed by any outside intrusion.

But, as it happened, they made a great mistake. They

The Hour of Conflict

nd been seen, although not disturbed. Marthe had decided to carry on her investigations and at the cost of several severe grumblings from her father for not bringing home a sufficient number of francs, she was rewarded after much impatient waiting by the sight of them in each other's arms. But to her great chagrin she was unable to get any amusement out of it by hinting darkly to Leyden on the golf links, for his clubs remained day after day neglected in the club house. All the same the impish caddy girl nodded her head sagely and kept the matter to herself. She kept many secrets from the others and this particular one was far too good to tell Jeanne or anybody else. So she carried henceforth for any other golfer who turned up, having decided that Leyden would no longer prove a profitable client, and wasted her time.

To Leyden's annoyance he was no longer alone at the café. There were other people staying at the Tardot in the persons of three Englishmen who might have been clerks on their yearly holiday. They were typically suburban people whose French was execrable and whose joviality was of the most noisome description. They spent their days, however, on the links and in the evenings after dinner disappeared into the town in an effort to master the intricacies of petits chevaux.

Leyden kept out of their way as much as possible by coming down to breakfast after they had finished and by getting through déjeuner at midday before they had finished their morning round. They made one attempt at friendliness by inviting him to make a fourth at bridge, but he was so offhand that after that they left him severely alone.

Everard was annoyed also to see that the Hotel Im-

The Hour of Conflict

périale down the road was daily sending its rumbling old bus down to the station and bringing fresh arrivals. He was afraid that somebody might come who knew him. He would then be compelled to accept invitations to lunch and golf and that was the last thing he desired. What was more, the sands began to be a popular place, as the weather still remained glorious; and the three suburbanites and many others of their kind took to bathing with great fervour. This was intensely annoying, as it was extremely possible that wandering parties might stumble upon Toinette and himself in the sand dunes.

So they changed their place of meeting and spent one glorious afternoon together in discovering a snug little cave some hundreds of yards along the beach where no prying eyes would be likely to pick them out. It was an ideal spot wherein two lovers could sit and talk. Deep sand covered the floor and even at high tide the sea only came to within twenty yards of the entrance.

To Toinette those days were one continual heaven. She walked on air and went about her duties in the morning before getting out to meet Everard with her heart filled to bursting point with joy and happiness. In spare moments which she snatched from the duties of the ménage she shut herself in her bedroom and wrote him little notes — sometimes three in a morning — in which all unconsciously she revealed her very soul.

These she did not drop into the letter box. She posted them in her pocket and then later, when the two were once more together in the cave, played a charming game of make believe in which she became the sturdy "facteur" who tramped the countryside with his stout stick, and his bag slung over his shoulder, and the cave

The Hour of Conflict

was transformed into the Café Tardot where she delivered the letters for the Englishman and had a little chat with Madame. Everard entered into the game and played the part of Madame so well that Toinette had difficulty in keeping up her character as "facteur" owing to the shrieks of laughter into which he sent her. Then finally when the letters had been satisfactorily delivered and the good "facteur" had received his *pourboire*, Leyden dropped the part of Madame and became himself and they sat down side by side and read the letters together. They took a long time to read, as the boy insisted on giving the usual lover's receipt for each one and dictating his answers to her to write in the sand while he guided her fingers.

Neither of them ever mentioned the subject of marriage,—Toinette because she took it for granted that she would be his wife in due course, Everard because he feared to spoil everything by worrying thoughts of the future. They both pursued the policy of *laissez faire* and read happiness in each other's eyes.

At odd moments, however, Everard caught himself half wishing that the affair had not gone beyond a flirtation. As an adventure it would have been just as perfect, or very nearly so,—and would have hurt neither of them when it ended. When it ended! That was the devil of it. It would have to end. That was inevitable. But how? He would feel it deeply. He didn't know quite what he should do when it was all over. She was so perfect, so glorious. But she . . . Good God! She was so much more violent in her emotions, that Everard dreaded to think how much it would hurt her. It was a question which he dared not face.

So he argued to himself fiercely that it was absurd to

The Hour of Conflict

let things stop where they were. There was to be the terrible business of parting for good — or so it seemed — when he had to return to England. Why therefore should they not realise their love to the very fullest extent? As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb! And they loved each other passionately. Every kiss, every look, every caress of her hand set his heart leaping and his blood coursing. Why should they not enjoy youth while it was theirs? It would be one of the great memories of their lives, one of the most unforgettable and glorious moments they would ever look back upon.

The sun was slowly sinking into a blood-red horizon. Its last rays crept into the little cave across the sparkling sea. The two had finished writing letters in the sand and the peace and stillness of the evening seemed to find an echo in their hearts. Everard was sitting with his back to the side of the rock gazing thoughtfully out, his eyes turning now and then to the head which nestled against his coat. Her hair brushed his cheek softly when the breeze lifted a dark curl as though for him to admire.

For a long time they remained motionless and silent. Then Toinette stirred. "I must go," she whispered. Her arms stole round his neck. "Kiss me good night, mon bien aimé."

Everard took her face in both his hands and looked into her eyes. "Do you remember singing 'Livre ta bouche à mes baisers'?" That was when we were both born." He kissed her. "That is not for good night. I am coming to speak to you at your window to-night."

CHAPTER XV

HIPPOLYTE GUERCHARD was sitting at a table in the salon behind the bar. His coat was off and his collar undone and his huge, fat, hairy arms showed from the elbow where there was a roll of shirt.

In front of him were many sheets of paper with writing on them and alterations and scratchings out. From time to time he passed a great hand through his tousled hair and gave a chuckle of glee which sounded like the wheezing of an enormous bulldog. In his right hand was a stump of pencil and after long pauses he dashed at the paper, his tongue working at every letter and his breath coming in gulps as he wrote in a large, bold hand. He was just bringing another sonnet to a successful conclusion.

Deep in an armchair was Toinette. On her lap lay a book, but as the minutes went by no page was turned. Her eyes saw nothing of the print.

An ormolu clock on the mantelpiece struck ten in a tinkly, cheap sort of way and on the last stroke the enormous man jabbed a full stop with a great flourish and turned to his daughter.

“Ah, ha, mignonne! Ecoute moi ceci!”

Toinette started at the sound of his voice and clutched her book. She recovered herself in a second and smiled up at her father. “Oh, but yes,” she said. “Read it to me.”

Hippolyte gathered up the sheets of paper, arranged

The Hour of Conflict

them carefully in order and rose to his feet. Throwing out his right hand in a broad gesture which included much staccato movement of his fingers, he cleared his throat and began to roll forth the lines of his sonnet. From time to time, as he ended some very well-thought-out line, he glanced for approval at his daughter and was rewarded by seeing her attitude of rapt attention.

Toinette's attention, however, got no further than the attitude. She merely heard the rumbling of a voice as a kind of accompaniment to her thoughts which crept out of the door and down the street and into the Café Tardot. Everard was coming to say good night! Supposing he were to be outside now and made some noise to attract her attention! Would *petit père* never finish? It seemed endless. She sat with her hands clasping the book in an agony of dread, hoping and praying that the recitation would be finished before Everard came.

At last after what seemed an hour the reading was brought to a dramatic end. Guerchard's smile spread all over his face. "Eh bien?" he cried. "Is not that beautiful? Does it not go with a swing which fills the heart with joy? Ah, ha! *ma chérie*, it is not every girl who has such a father! eh?"

Toinette rose to her feet with a quick breath of relief. She placed her book on the table and her arms round her father. "It was indeed beautiful, *petit père!*" she said. "It is your very best. . . . Are you going to bed now? I am so tired."

"Tired? Eh? . . . Ah, I tell you, it takes a man with a soul to think of lines like that, a man of imagination, a poet, *quoi?* *Nom d'un nom, ma petite*, let me read you those last stanzas once more. They are my very soul. *Ecoute!*"

The Hour of Conflict

Toinette bit her lip. "Not now, father. Let us go. It is very late. See, the clock says . . ."

Hippolyte nodded. "Bien! Bien! Let us to bed . . . Ah, but that verse!" He began mumbling the lines to himself as Toinette hurriedly tidied the room in preparation for retiring.

She turned to him with her hand on the gas. "Are you ready?"

Guerchard looked up astonished from his pages. "Eh? Ready? Oh, yes, we are going to bed, is it not so? Good night, my heart. Sleep well and may the Sainte Vierge guard you." He tucked his sonnet anyhow into his pocket, all crumpled up, and took the girl into his arms, kissing her tenderly on the forehead. "But you look tired, little one. Have I made you work too hard, pig that I am, while I scribbled stupidities on paper. Ah, sapristi! What a wretch you have for a father." He struck himself fiercely on the brow with the back of his hand. "Grand Dieu! you are worn out and I have not noticed it. *Pauvre chérie*. Forgive me. I am a fool, a dreamer! Let me carry you up. Do not rise early to-morrow. Sleep your fill and I will bring you your coffee and rolls. Eh, petite? Let your fat one of a father carry you the petit déjeuner on a little tray and sit on the end of your bed while you eat it. Would not that be nice? Eh, mon Dieu, to-morrow you must do nothing, nothing! You must rest. Or we shall have you ill and then, *bon sang de bong sang!* that would be terrible. What should I do? What . . ."

Toinette patted his shoulder and kissed his cheek with an affectionate laugh. "Oh, la, la!" she cried. "You imagine to yourself that I am already ill. I am only a little tired. Good night, petit père."

The Hour of Conflict

Guerchard opened the door and lit two candles on a shelf outside. "Voilà!" he exclaimed. "We are ready!"

Toinette turned out the gas and made her way across the dark room to where the poet awaited her outside with the candle. With an arm round her waist Guerchard mounted the stairs with her, opened her door, set down the candle in its accustomed place on the dressing table, took her hand and kissed the tips of her fingers. "Bonsoir mignonne," he said, and with a wave of his hand shut the door behind him.

Toinette stood for a moment where he had left her, looking at the door. She heard his footsteps go along the passage, and then came the sound of his door being shut. Then she turned quickly to the window and looked out. The shadowy road was empty. Everard had not come.

She turned into the room again with its white paper, and its picture of the Madonna and Child, its crucifix over the bed, its white dressing table and mirror, the little washstand against the wall, the cheap photograph of her father over the mantelpiece. Then she knelt down by the side of her bed and said her prayers as she had said them every night since she could remember. But they were not quite the same, for a new name was included among those for whom she prayed.

There was only one candle in the room and by its feeble light she undressed and brushed her hair. It came down below her waist, thick and very black and many minutes elapsed before it was satisfactorily remade in two long plaits. For some moments she stood listening, but the only sounds from outside were the cry of the frogs from the marshland opposite and the

The Hour of Conflict

rumble of the waves as they broke on the cliffs. He had not come.

She took up the candle, held it for a second and then blew it out, replaced it on the dressing table and got into bed. As her head went down upon the pillow she gave a sigh which in the darkness might easily have been mistaken for a sob. Everard had not come.

Sleep laid its hand gently upon her eyes and wafted her out upon the boundless sea of dreams. How far she floated in those mystic waters she could not know, but suddenly through worlds of space the whisper of a name came hurrying after her. Toinette! That was the whisper, and again, Toinette! Her ears caught the word vaguely at first and without realisation. Then as it came once more the hand of sleep was thrust aside and she sat up quickly. What was it?

“Toinette!”

A murmur of great gladness broke from her and she left the warm pillow, lit the candle and slid across to the window. Everard had come!

Cautiously she raised it and pulled aside the blind. “C'est toi!” she whispered.

Down below, a shadow on the dim white line of road, stood Everard, his face raised to hers. “Were you asleep?” he asked.

Toinette leaned far out and one of her plaits slipped from her shoulder and dangled down. Everard caught his breath. In two days he would be away in England. Good God!

“I was dreaming,” said Toinette, “that you and I were wrecked on a desert island.”

“Come down, Toinette,” said Everard. “I cannot say good night to you down here. I want to feel you in

The Hour of Conflict

my arms, your heart beating against mine. Come down."

Toinette shook her head. "It is impossible," she answered. "But see. I blow you a kiss. Catch!" She placed both her hands to her lips and sent him down two kisses.

Everard moved nearer to the wall of the house and felt it in places with the palm of his hand. She was only twelve feet above him and there was a lower window.

"What are you doing?" asked the girl.

Everard gave a quick laugh of excitement. "I am going to climb up to you," he said.

With her heart beating wildly for fear he should fall and be hurt, Toinette watched him climb up on to the window ledge beneath her, reach up and feel for a grip upon the rough stones of the wall and inch by inch creep nearer. Suddenly she gave a low cry. He had slipped and was lying on the ground.

"Ah, do not!" she whispered. "I implore you, do not. Are you hurt?"

But Everard leaped up. "No," he cried. "It is easy." He clambered up once more on to the window ledge, balanced himself carefully for a moment and then sprang.

His fingers just reached the ledge of her window and clutched frantically. After an appalling second of strain his feet found a purchase and very gradually he raised himself till his head was level with hers, his eyes burning with triumph.

Toinette drew back into the room with a strange little cry and Everard swung one leg into the room, ducked his head under the window frame and stood beside her.

There was only the candle burning and for a long mo-

The Hour of Conflict

ment he and she stood motionless gazing at each other, with the picture of the Virgin and Child and the crucifix on the white wall above them. Then Everard went to the door and turned the key in the lock and came back to her. Her lips were parted, one hand pressed against her breast.

Swiftly he drew her to him and kissed her again and again. She clung to him and the warmth of her body intoxicated him. . . .

And the frogs went on singing while the tide receded slowly from the rocks.

CHAPTER XVI

MADAME TARDOT opened the door of the salon and waddled in, a friendly smile spreading over her entire countenance. "Bonjour, Monsieur," she chirruped, coming to a halt by the table where Leyden was eating. She propped her hands upon her ample hips.

Leyden nodded and said good morning.

Madame wagged her head like a mandarin and did her best to look severe. "You and I must quarrel, Monsieur Leyden," she said, "although it is with regret."

"Quarrel?" said Leyden. "Oh, Madame!"

"Oh, la! la!" Madame's severity disappeared. "It is not as serious as all that. But you left the door wide open last night. Juste ciel! suppose that some thief had entered and murdered us all in our beds! What then? Hein! Suppose all my guests stayed out as late as you . . . oh, yes! I heard you. And I looked at my watch and what do you think it said, eh?"

Leyden frowned over his plate and drank his chocolate quickly without replying.

Madame threw up her hands. "Four o'clock, mon Dieu! Think! Quatre heures du matin! What a time to go to bed. No wonder you are late this morning?"

Leyden put down his cup and rose. "I am very sorry that I forgot to close the door, Madame. It shall not occur again. I ask you to forgive me."

Madame chuckled and slanted her head. "You

The Hour of Conflict

missed the last train from Boulogne perhaps? The Casino is very gay, hein?"

Leyden caught at the idea gladly. She did not know. "Yes," he said quickly. "That was it. I had to walk all the way and, sapristi, if you knew how tired I was!"

"Ah, well!" Madame smiled and spread her hands. "When one is young, eh? . . . And so you leave me tomorrow? You return to your country? I am sorry. I hope that your stay here has been one of pleasure in spite of your loneliness. But then the golf seems to be specially for a solitary, n'est ce pas?"

"You are right, Madame," said Leyden. "Golf is a game in which a man can find pleasure by himself. I have been very happy with you, and perhaps later on I may come again."

Madame took up his words eagerly. "Come again! Ah, that is good. You have only to write to me—a little word—and your room is ready for you."

"Thank you. I will not forget." Leyden moved towards the door. Madame took the hint and waddled out into the bar, there to work out his pension so as to have it all ready for him the following morning. She was a thoughtful soul whose custom it was to enter into the closest details,—a box of matches, a half-used candle. It was, after all, only a matter of centimes, so why should her clients object? There was all the difference between what she called "*la grande vitesse et le petit doucement*."

Everard was labouring under a wave of depression. He had only one more day and already he was feeling keenly the anticipation of saying good-bye to Toinette. She had laughed when he told her yesterday that he was going away. "It is impossible," she said. "I love you

The Hour of Conflict

and you cannot go. Our lives are together for ever and ever."

How she would take it after last night Heaven alone knew! For himself he would have given all he possessed in the world to stay on. He tried to comfort himself with the idea that soon, in a few short weeks, he would return. Then once more they would go down upon the sands and make their way to the little cave and let the sun tan their faces and hands and be completely happy again.

He went up to his room and filled his case with cigarettes and then, possessed by a feeling of certainty that Toinette would be in the cave he hurried out of the café and made his way down to the shore. The tide was coming in. He clambered over the rocks which jutted out a long way to the sea and then strode across the golden sands towards the meeting place.

Toinette came out of the cave. "You have come!" she said. "I knew you would. . . . But why are you so triste, so long of face, this morning?"

Everard made no answer.

The girl seated herself upon the sands and pulled him down beside her. "I have got something very serious to ask you," she went on. "You must be all attention."

To-morrow the boat would steam away. How damnable! He nodded. "I am listening," he said.

Toinette pulled his sleeve. "Is anything the matter?" she asked. "You . . . you are not very . . ."

Everard flung out his hands. "I am thinking of to-morrow," he replied.

Toinette clapped her hands. "Je m'en fiche pas mal de demain. Let us think of to-day. Listen, Everard!" She dropped her eyes and blushed and began to pick her

The Hour of Conflict

frock with her fingers. "I think my father ought to know that . . . that we love each other. It hurts me to go on telling . . . inventing things so as to come to you." There was a pause. Then she looked up with a smile and leaned her head on his shoulder. "When are you going to speak to him?"

Everard bit his lip and pulled out his cigarette case. Now or never was the time to make her realise. "May I smoke?" he asked.

The girl nodded.

He lit a cigarette and blew out quick puffs of smoke for several moments.

"Eh bien?" Toinette's eyes were on his face.

"Eh bien," said Everard with an attempt at lightness.

"It is no good my telling him *now*."

"Why not?"

The boy pointed to the sea. "To-morrow I shall be out there and then . . . and then you won't have to go on inventing things."

"*To-morrow?*" echoed the girl. "Quelle blague! How silly! You could not go away and leave me all alone. . . . It would not be you to do so selfish a thing."

Everard threw away his cigarette and put his arms round her. "Little one," he said. "Let us talk very seriously . . . We have only a few more hours left. To-morrow I go away to England and so we must think about saying good-bye, n'est ce pas? and tell each other that we shall never forget how we loved each other . . ."

Toinette wriggled away and knelt in front of him, her eyes fastened on his, her face very white, her lips quivering. "You . . . you are really going?" she whispered. "You are to leave Wimereux . . . to-morrow?"

The Hour of Conflict

Everard looked away and nodded.

"But I do not understand," said Toinette with a helpless little gesture. "If you love me why do you go?"

"But I *must*," said Everard. "I cannot stay here forever."

"Why not? Are you not happy?"

The boy caught her hand. "Happy! Mon Dieu. I desire no other happiness than to be near you."

"Then . . ."

Everard groaned. "Oh, my God! what can I say? . . . There is my family, my work. I have to go and do things, to take my place in the world. . . . I am a man and I have to do the things a man does. Don't you understand, Toinette? Don't you realise how it is?"

The girl was still on her knees gazing at his face. "You go away," she murmured. "And I . . . what do I do? What have you left me?"

"You," said Everard. "You have what I have—the memory of our great love, a memory which I shall carry through life as my most sacred possession. Does that count for nothing?"

Toinette rose to her feet unsteadily and passed one hand across her forehead wearily. She was as white as her blouse.

Everard leaped up in an agony that she was going to faint. But Toinette held out her hand and pushed him gently away. There was a puzzled frown on her face.

"I do not understand," she said quietly, almost as if to herself. "I do not understand. I am going away . . . to think. . . . To-morrow! Sainte Vierge!"

She turned away and began to walk out of the cave.

The Hour of Conflict

Everard snatched at her hand. "Don't go!" he said. "Let us sit here and talk it over. Toinette, wait!"

But Toinette freed herself with a curiously dignified and womanly gesture as if she had suddenly grown many years older. She looked at him with an expression in her eyes which he could not understand and when she spoke her voice was very low. "I will come again this evening." Then she turned once more and walked quickly away.

Everard stood gazing after her until she crossed the rocks without looking back. His fists were clenched and his lips set tight. At last she disappeared and the boy threw himself down on the sand.

"Why did I ever do it?" he said. "My God! why did I do it?"

And it was to have been the most beautiful memory in his life.

CHAPTER XVII

TOINETTE was going away to think.

In a sort of dream she climbed the path up to the digue and under the windows of the big Hotel Impériale she stopped. To think! That was impossible at home. She could not face her father in her present state of mind. She wanted to be alone to be able to realise the meaning of what had happened. Everard was going. . . . He had said so. . . . Going. . . . What did that mean?

She turned and began to walk along by the side of the sand dunes. That way was as good as any other. Her head drooped and she saw nothing of the groups of bathers who chattered and splashed near the shore. She walked blindly on in a dazed, absent-minded way.

She had gone away to think.

But thinking was impossible. A hundred thousand incoherent things flashed into her mind at once and mixed up in an inextricable jumble, and at the back of them all ran one fixed phrase which repeated itself with horrible regularity. "Everard is going . . . to-morrow . . . Everard is going . . . to-morrow."

She went on and on, the sun beating fiercely down upon her bare head. She did not know that the sun was shining. She did not know that she was walking. She did not know that she was Toinette Guerchard. Her mind seemed outside her, hovering above, and it looked down upon a girl — a young girl who was very old —

The Hour of Conflict

who was moving quickly along with a very white face on which was a strained, intent look. "Poor girl," said her mind. "I wonder what she is suffering about."

After what seemed an eternity she heard an odd, hollow sound beneath her feet and in a dull, stupid way realised that she was crossing the wooden bridge into Ambleteuse. She passed her hand over her forehead. Ambleteuse? . . . Somebody lived there whom she knew. "Évérard is going . . . to-morrow."

Her legs carried her along entirely by themselves. Where were they taking her? The question was too difficult. She gave up trying to find the answer. Up the little street she went, straight along, unswerving.

She did not see that her friends, the shopkeepers who stood at their doorways, nodded a bonjour at her. She did not know that she mechanically replied "Bonjour" to each one with a something like her usual friendly smile. She did not know that she had walked up the steps of the church until she dipped her fingers automatically into the holy water and crossed herself.

Then she went into the nearest pew and knelt down and as she put her face into her hands she felt that her cheeks were burning and that her tongue was dry and that her head was throbbing. Why? What had she done to feel so strange?

"Évérard is going . . . to-morrow."

She raised her head. Her eyes fell upon the figure of Christ crucified and a burning blush covered her face and neck. How dared she kneel in front of His altar and try and pray — she who was no longer Toinette? How dared she turn to Him for help to realise what had happened when she had made herself His enemy? How dared she go into His house after last night?

The Hour of Conflict

All her early training and faith seemed to drop from her. It was impossible to believe that God would ever forgive her for what she had done. God was kind and merciful. God was forgiveness and goodness and pity—yes, but not to her. She had forfeited all that. She was His enemy.

With a sudden movement of fear she rose and hurried from the church, away from the eyes of the Man who had died for her, the Man who would forgive anything, and whose eyes she dared not meet.

She had come away to be alone,—to think. Where could she go? What could she think?

“Evérard is going . . . to-morrow.”

She was balanced on the brink of an abyss and some one was creeping up behind her to push her over. She hurried along to get away, to escape, but as she moved the abyss moved also and all the time the figure behind was creeping nearer and nearer. She wanted to call out for help, but there was no one to call to. She was alone, helpless. God was her enemy, and Everard would not hear. He was going away.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was his last day in France. And he had intended it to be such a cheery one! They were to have picnicked on the sands, to have talked and laughed—Toinette would be very brave—and had such a tender leave-taking that the train would have carried him to Boulogne before either of them realised that the parting was over.

It had all been arranged so nicely in his mind without a single tear—or perhaps just one at the very last moment. And then England,—London with its work, not *too* much, its dinners, its dances, everything to cheer him up and help him to fill up the hole made by her absence, to forget her—at any rate for a time, while he was trying to make an income. Perhaps with decent luck, he would be able to return, independent of his father, and then . . .

But the reality was horribly different. His last day? He would never forget it—the hideous pacing of the sands, arguing round and round in a circle, cursing himself for what he had done, wishing that he had never come to the place, never met her, never been born.

It was a day of torture. After Toinette left him he wandered aimlessly back across the links where the sight of the three Englishmen from the Café Tardot put him into a state of blasphemous and unreasoning rage. So he hurried back to the café and threw his things into the suit case and kit bag, almost decided to go at once.

The Hour of Conflict

But it was impossible to go without seeing Toinette again, without trying to put things right as far as possible, to comfort her as best he could. He went down and lunched. That is to say he ate things which all tasted the same and then hurried away from the café down to the seashore. She was coming in the afternoon.

Hour after hour he hung about the cave, lighting one cigarette from another until his lips were dry and cracked. He hurried along to the dunes to see if she had gone there by mistake. He went back to the café to see if there were any message from her. He returned to the cave and waited again and all the time he reproached himself. If only he had not climbed into her room! If only he had been able to content himself with her kisses.

He watched the sun climb up the sky and then begin to lengthen the shadows as it went slowly down the other side, more slowly than it had ever gone before. The tide turned and began to come in again and still he remained at the cave, and the sun sank lower and lower. The people bathing and paddling had gone away leaving the beach a silent, still place, hardly a murmur reaching him as the sea crept up from the far ebb.

He was sitting with his chin in his hands, his elbows propped on his knees, gazing out on the misty horizon when she suddenly appeared from space.

The sun had set and the light was quickly fading, but he could see that she was very pale. He rose stiffly, his limbs aching from the strain of sitting for long in the same position. "Thank God you've come," he said quickly. "I thought . . ."

Toinette put her hand on his arm. "Evérard, I am

The Hour of Conflict

coming with you to-morrow. I will leave my father and my home and my country if you will take me with you. You have your work. Let me work with you, for you. I can cook and sew and wash clothes. I will be very useful and help you. I will try not to be in the way and will do my best to be a good daughter to your father and mother . . . What time do we have to go? I have made all preparations."

Everard gasped. He looked to see if she were not joking. Surely she could not realise what she was suggesting, the utter impossibility of it. A picture of his parents,—his smart, perfectly gowned mother, his well-groomed old father—flashed into his mind as they met him coming up the steps with the little French girl in her cheap frocks. The cynical amusement and disgust upon their faces made him feel very cold and uncomfortable. But Toinette's face remained very grave. There was no suggestion of fun in those deep black eyes. She had decided that such an enormous sacrifice was not a sacrifice at all. She would be going where love led, where her whole being demanded that she should go.

"Mon Dieu!" said Everard. "If only I could take you, Toinette! . . . But it is impossible. It cannot be done. I . . ." He broke off with a helpless shrug of the shoulders. "I *cannot* take you."

Then Toinette's eyes flashed and her fists clenched. She stamped her foot. "You *must* take me! Do you hear? You must! I have given you my heart, my soul, everything . . . and now you say you are leaving me, deserting me. It is infamous. You cannot go. You do not love me . . . Evérard, you must not go!" She covered her face with her hands and burst into violent

The Hour of Conflict

weeping. "Oh, mon Dieu! what can I do? what can I do?"

Everard put his arms round her shaking shoulders. "Oh, my God! This is horrible," he said. "Toinette! Toinette! Do you not see that I must go, that it's impossible for me to remain and impossible to take you. How could we marry? I have no money, darling, I am earning nothing. We should starve . . . Do not cry, little one. I implore you, be brave. Du courage! Du courage! I will come back soon!" He held her tight and kissed her hair, her hands. His eyes were very moist and his heart was thumping.

The girl clung to him passionately and through her tears came a broken murmur imploring him to stay, imploring him to take her. The light had failed. It was quite dark with only the stars peeping down at the two as they stood together outside the cave, the two children who had allowed themselves to be swept away by a fierce impulse.

For a long time the rumble of the sea as it came farther up the beach was the only sound which broke the stillness. Toinette lay in the boy's arms with long, shuddering sobs, every one of which gave him agony. He and he alone was to blame. He had laid himself out from the start to win her and he had succeeded all too well,—he was himself beaten by her. Suddenly she raised herself and with her cheeks all stained by tears she looked into his eyes searchingly, as if she saw to the bottom of his soul. Her hands felt curiously cold and the boy could not read what was in her mind.

"Toinette, what is it?" he whispered anxiously.

The girl's voice came with an extraordinary hardness as if it was not really she who spoke. "It is over," she

The Hour of Conflict

said. "It is finished." She placed her hands upon his face. "Kiss me. . . . It is the last time."

With a little cry, a mixture of gladness and pain— gladness because she was, he thought, at last being brave, and pain because the moment had come when they must part,— he pressed his lips to hers for a long, long minute.

"Go now," said Toinette. "I am remaining here for a little."

"You wish me to leave you?"

Toinette nodded.

They stood face to face, their hands clasped tight. Then Everard slowly raised hers to his lips. "I . . . am sorry," he said.

"Adieu!" said Toinette.

Everard turned on his heel and began to walk quickly away. His shoulders drooped and everything was a blur before his eyes.

It was over.

He turned at last as he climbed up the digue and stood above the sands.

Toinette had disappeared.

CHAPTER XIX

EVERARD set down his cup of chocolate with a clatter and rose from the table. There were dark lines under his eyes which were in strange contrast to the sunburn which covered his face. He rang the bell savagely.

The maid entered.

Leyden did not look up from filling his pipe. "My bill," he said.

In a moment Madame Tardot entered and laid it silently on the breakfast table.

Everard was too much occupied with his thoughts to notice that Madame had a strangely subdued look and that in place of her usual good-natured chatter she made no remark,—did not even wish him bonjour. He glanced at the bill, counted out the amount and laid it down.

"Merci, Monsieur," said Madame. She picked it up, taking care to make no noise and turned towards the door.

"Is the carriage coming?"

"In ten minutes, Monsieur," said Madame. The door closed quietly.

The boy lit his pipe and went through the bar and out into the sunny street. It was just after nine o'clock and no one was yet playing golf. As a rule the laughter of the caddies who passed the time by swinging clubs and putting upon the piece of rough turf round the shed

The Hour of Conflict

while waiting for the first players to arrive, came shrill and clear.

This morning they were silent. They made a little group at the entrance to the shed and spoke only in whispers.

As Everard walked up the entrance drive to the club house to get his golf bag, their customary cheeky "Bonjour, Monsieur" sounded as subdued as Madame Tardot. The wide steps of the club veranda looked very clean in the sunshine and the two small boys sprang to the door as Everard went up them.

The steward came forward from the smoking room. "Good morning, sir. Off to-day?"

Everard nodded. "How much do I owe you?"

The man opened the smoking-room door. "I'll just see, sir, if you don't mind coming in."

Everard went in and the steward came round behind the bar and produced his account book.

"Here we are," he said. "Tobacco, Mr. Leyden, two fifty. . . . That's all, sir. Two francs fifty."

Everard put a ten-franc piece upon the counter.

"Have you got your clubs, sir?"

Everard shook his head. The man leaned out of the bar and called. "Jim! Just get this gentleman's clubs from the rack. . . . Two fifty, ten francs. Let's see, that's seven fifty." He passed the money over. "That's right, sir."

The boy swept it into his pocket. "Thanks," he said.

The steward planted his elbows on the counter and leaned across with a smile on his cockney face. "Have you heard the news this morning, sir?"

Everard disliked the man. He turned to the table on

The Hour of Conflict

which the papers were arranged in neat rows. "No," he said. "Has the boy got my clubs yet?"

"He'll be along in a second, sir," said the steward. "Ah, quite some excitement this morning I can tell you. I heard about it when I come up from Wimeroo early. I wonder they didn't tell you across at the caffy."

"What is it you're talking about?" asked Everard. "I've not been told anything."

"A suicide so they tell me," said the steward. "At least they don't know whether she drowned herself or met with an accident. Pretty young thing she was, too. I expect you've seen her about, sir."

Everard gazed at the man blankly. "She . . . who?"

"Oh, I expect her man ran off with some other girl. That seems to be the usual thing in this country. . . . You know, sir, that girl down the road, used to go about with a neat ankle showing. Quite a cut above the caddy class."

"I don't know who you mean," said Everard. He was bored by the man's long-windedness.

"The girl from the Caffy Guerchard you know, sir, black hair and a pretty face. They found her body this morning."

Everard gazed at him dully. "The girl from the . . ."

The swing door opened and the small English boy came in with a cheery grin on his face and Everard's clubs. "Here you are, sir. I 'ad to go to the professional's shed for them."

For a long second Everard stood quite still. The steward's words were repeating themselves in his brain. Then suddenly his pipe dropped from his hand with a clatter on to the oilcloth and the burning tobacco scat-

The Hour of Conflict

tered in every direction. "No!" he muttered. "It isn't true . . . it . . ."

The boy picked up the pipe. Everard mechanically took it from him, dropped it into his pocket, caught up the clubs and pushed his way through the swing door. "Good-bye, sir," said the steward.

He received no answer. Everard was already outside, running hard. He dashed back to the café and threw his clubs into the corner. There was a *voiture* outside. It was to take him to the station. His luggage was piled up by the driver. Everard paid no attention to it. He went quickly along the road to the Café Guerchard, pushed open the door of the bar and went in.

The place was empty.

He called out. There was no reply, but presently he became aware of a curious sound from somewhere upstairs.

Without a moment's hesitation he went round the bar, disappeared through the door leading to the house and up the flight of stairs.

"Monsieur Guerchard! . . . Toinette!"

There was no answer. The noise was clearer and the boy felt his heart thumping against his ribs as he stood in the corridor and listened. Somewhere—in one of those rooms—a man was sobbing.

He went quickly forward to the sound and gently opened a door.

It was *her* room, the room into which he had climbed only two nights—or was it two years—ago in the dead of night. He stood rooted in the doorway.

By the side of the little white bed knelt Hippolyte Guerchard, his body shaking, his face buried in the bed-clothes, his fingers working and clutching in a passion of

The Hour of Conflict

grief and from time to time a great dry sob shook him from head to foot.

Everard's heart stopped beating. He crept into the room almost stealthily, refusing to believe that the still figure on the bed was Toinette.

She was dressed as he had seen her last in a blouse and skirt. But now she was white and cold and her soaked clothes clung to her body. Her hands were folded reverently across her breast and her black hair lay in damp streaks across the pillow. From one of her shoes with the dainty metal buckles hung a long strand of seaweed. Hippolyte Guerchard raised his tear-stained face from the bed and saw the Englishman, his hands clasped together, staring at the dead body of his daughter. His lips moved and he tried to speak . . .

How long Everard remained in that white bedroom he will never know. But the picture of the dead girl was burnt into his brain,— the wet hair surrounding the white face and the seaweed dragging from her shoe. Suddenly he moved and a great shiver went through him and he crept away.

Outside the Café Tardot the carriage was standing. It was surrounded by a number of caddies waiting to see the Englishman off. They were talking excitedly on the prospect of his giving them all a parting *pour-boire*.

But Marthe stood on one side looking along the road in the direction of the Café Guerchard. She remembered the day when she had crept silently among the sand dunes and seen the Englishman kissing Toinette.

At last Everard came out of the café. He walked quickly, a strange look in his eyes, seeing nothing until he found himself beside the cab.

The Hour of Conflict

Madame placed his golf clubs in the cab. "Au plaisir de vous revoir, Monsieur," she said.

Leyden held out his hand mechanically. "Au revoir, Madame," he said and got into the cab.

Marthe was peering at him curiously.

The cabman cracked his whip and the horses plunged forward. Everard sank back in his seat inside the cab and covered his face with his hands. "I am a murderer . . . my God!"

And the caddies raised a merry cheer as the cab rolled down the road.



Part II

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses, which appears to be a directory or a list of contacts. The names are listed in a vertical column on the left side of the page.



CHAPTER I

FROM dinner onwards, men and women in a thousand different houses in London were rouging or blackening and transforming themselves for one all too short night into Greek gods, red Indians, prima ballerinas, funeral mutes, or whatever else their whimsicality suggested. The unfortunates who had neither the means nor the luck to secure tickets were waiting patiently on the steps of the Albert Hall under the charge of equally patient policemen to see them drive up in taxis.

Bluebeards in silk turbans handed out prim little early Victorian maidens; Bacchus drove up in the company of a pale, cloistered nun; Mephistopheles with an eastern Houri. They were seen and eyed laughingly by the crowd until, armed with the open sesame of a red or white ticket, they passed the guardian Beefeaters at the door and vanished within the hall of a thousand delights. From the ballroom came the strains of the orchestra challenged by the buzz of laughter and conversation from the hundreds of curiously assorted couples who waltzed uncomfortably but merrily,—like sardines trying to dance in the confinement of their tin. All the races of the earth from the beginning of time were gathered under the roof of the mighty building, and if there was none bold enough to represent Adam there were several whose imitation of Eve was a close one. In the confused blur of colour kaleidoscoping the floor

The Hour of Conflict

the eye was caught for a second by a Dutch Girl in white cap and clogs flashing by on the arm of King Charles, beruffled, bewigged and belaced; an Apache, coloured handkerchief doing duty for collar and béret over one eye clasping an Irish colleen; a Crusader, his helmet glinting in the countless lights, his white cloak flowing, breathing sweet nothings into the ear of the Hen Pheasant; Cupid, bare of leg and arm, fast in the arms of Death. In the tiers of boxes ranged all round the circle Harlequins and Columbines, natives of ancient Greece and Rome, Nelsons and Napoleons hobnobbed with Assyrians, Harry Lauders, Man Fridays, Mummies and eighteenth-century Bucks.

A sudden burst of applause drew all eyes to the entrance of Don Quixote, aloof of eye and lined of face, bearing his gigantic lance and shield and mounted upon the gallant but eccentric charger whose hind legs moved quite independently of his front ones.

A French fisherman in loose blouse and tam o'shanter hat slouched over to a golden-haired maiden clad in a leopard skin and vine leaves and touched his forelock.

"Mademoiselle veut des poissons?" he demanded gruffly.

For a moment the maiden stared. "Why, it's *you!*" she cried at last. She was very carefully made up with a particular attention to detail. In the brilliantly lighted ballroom her complexion had the delicacy of a just ripe peach. Her neck and breast and arms were a creamy white. Under her eye-lashes was a faint, barely perceptible line of black, and the vine leaves in her hair were arranged with the certainty of an artist. Her eyelids half lowered as she met the eyes of the burly

The Hour of Conflict

fisherman and a tiny smile puckered the corners of her mouth as he slipped his arm round her waist and danced her away. He was hers body and soul,—her latest,—and to-night, well,—she would be kind to him . . . up to a point. Meanwhile the music was oriental, passionate, with an underlying note of plaintiveness, and it stirred the fisherman to his depths. The touch of her, her half smile, the perfume of her, maddened him. . . .

And while they danced, alone together among the many thousand people, a Georgian dandy in nankeen trousers and stock raised a shaky hand to his moustache and gave a cynical little chuckle as they flashed past his bleary eyes. "That damned feller again!" he muttered. "But by God she does it well!"

He gazed at his wife's beautiful figure until it was hidden in the crowd and then he went back into his box and told a waiter to bring him champagne. He was alone in the box when it was brought and he amused himself by drinking a glass every time he succeeded in catching any woman's eye. The dandy, his hand now even more shaky, found it a very good game. Before twenty minutes had passed he had been joined by Bunty, a ballet dancer and Cupid. The ballet dancer in his opinion displayed the most charms, so after quenching the thirst of the other two,—it took some time,—he sent them away and turned the whole of his attention to her.

The little interlude had not passed unobserved. Many of the dancers who recognised the old dandy under his make-up, stood below and watched while it was taking place, making sarcastic comments. The maiden in vine leaves saw it also over the shoulder of the burly fisher-

The Hour of Conflict

man but beyond a slight deepening of her enigmatical smile she made no sign. They were a happily married couple.

At the beginning of the dance the spirit of Bohemianism was of a somewhat early Victorian order. But as dance followed dance and the supper parties in the boxes and the gallery returned to the fray the Latin note grew and increased in volume with every minute. The waltz, two-step, one-step and all the other commonly accepted forms of dancing had ceased to appeal and on every side couples were inventing steps of their own. Cinderella whose chemise was slashed with extravagant realism stood nose to nose with PUNCHINELLO, swaying as he swayed, from the hips, her face expressionless, her eyes fixed on his, her arms locked round his neck. Another couple was extemporising Apache movements with occasional bunny hugs thrown in to the amused discomfort of the many people from whom they rebounded.

The French fisherman had a box. The remains of supper for two covered the table which had been pushed back into the corner. Many half-smoked cigarettes lay in the saucer of the leopard-skin maiden's coffee cup. It was nearly four o'clock when she yawned profoundly.

"Doggo?" asked the fisherman.

"Absolutely finished," said she. "You may drive me home."

The fisherman fetched her cloak with a gleam in his eyes. They threaded their way along the corridors filled with people sitting out on the floor, and passed out of the swing doors into the cool morning. It was raining as they got into a taxi and drove quickly through the empty streets. The maiden was tired, too tired to resist the

The Hour of Conflict

strong arm which held her close or the lips which found hers.

There were lights in the house when they arrived. The fisherman opened the door with her key. "Has he got back?" The maiden waved an expressive hand and led the way to the dining-room. "You'd like a drink?"

The fisherman muttered something and followed.

She opened the door. There was the sound of a chair being pushed back inside the room. The fisherman saw a tall, sunburnt boy rise and come forward.

The maiden in the leopard skin gave a surprised exclamation. "Oh," she said. "You're back then, Everard. Fancy waiting up!"

"Hello, mother," said Everard. He bent down and kissed the cheek which she carelessly offered him. "Is father with you?" His eye took in the few details of mother's dress and then the fisherman.

Mrs. Leyden shrugged her shoulders. "No," she said, "he's still amusing himself. . . . Hugh, I don't think you've met my son. Everard, Mr. Wilmerton."

The French fisherman nodded with some amiability. It was excellently done, for his annoyance at finding any one in the house was extreme. "H'are you?" he said. "Is your brown sun or greasepaint?"

"Help yourself, Hugh," said Mrs. Leyden.

Wilmerton caught the altered tone of her voice. There was boredom in it and a trace of temper. A frown creased his forehead. "Is that for me?" he thought, "or the lad?" He went over to the sideboard and mixed himself a brandy and soda.

Mrs. Leyden turned to her son. "Good night," she said casually.

The Hour of Conflict

In the sideboard looking-glass Everard caught the man's faint smile of triumph. A kind of shiver ran through him and he faced round on his mother. The words would not come as he met her eye, and without saying anything he walked out of the room and closed the door quietly behind him.

CHAPTER II

A MAN never seems to have the time to think until it is made for him. The average person, however little he may be conscious of it, treads in a groove. The same sort of things happen day after day and beyond the thought necessary to get through them it is seldom that he digs below the surface of things and arrives at the consideration of what it is all about, what he is doing with himself or what life is doing and will do to him. The ordinary affairs of every day conspire to prevent it. But when something occurs, a severe illness or a great shock, which thrusts aside matters of routine, then it is that difficult queries float unasked into the brain and demand an answer. The convalescent lying for hours on his back falls, from his very proximity to the primary facts of Life and Death, an easy prey to thoughts of the beyond. He has only just escaped and so, perhaps for the first time in his life, he is concerned with what it is that he *has* escaped. What is death? What is the other side? What are the rules of the game and who is the umpire?—questions to which even the greatest thinkers have found it difficult to worry out a solution.

For the first time in his twenty-four years Everard had been brought up suddenly face to face with something vital. He had believed himself to be clasping Love to his heart and suddenly Love had changed to the grim figure of Death grinning up into his face. Death in the abstract needs a great deal of courage to face, but

The Hour of Conflict

when it takes on a personal and terribly intimate aspect a man must either bend or break.

The consideration of death had never come to Everard until now. Until this moment he had never been pulled up and made to think by hearing that some one he knew had died.

But now with hideous unfairness, with no warning, no time to allow the lad to prepare himself for the inevitable, Death had snatched away not just an acquaintance but the one being in all the world who had ever found a way to the boy's heart. The suddenness of it all had made the shock a million times greater. It numbed his brain. The journey back to London had been made mechanically. He had gone ashore at Folkestone and into the train and through the customs at Charing Cross without knowing it and finally got out of the taxi which took him home to Eaton Square as if he were fuddled with drink.

He had gone straight upstairs to his room by pure instinct without having realised that he was home again. Still in his overcoat which he had worn in the taxi, although it was very hot, he went across to the window and stood leaning on the sill, countless lights beneath him, moving and stationary. A servant brought in his luggage. Without turning round Everard spoke in French.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" A look of puzzled amazement was not very successfully hidden by the man.

The quite ordinary sentence pronounced with a careful accent had the most extraordinary effect upon the boy. Something seemed to snap in his brain, as if a spring had been released and the tension had all gone out of it. He stood trembling violently.

The Hour of Conflict

The door closed behind the servant. His head went down upon his arms. A choking cry broke from him. "Toinette! . . . Toinette! . . . Oh, God!"

Great sobs shook his whole body. He had killed her. He staggered from the window, threw himself upon the bed and buried his face in the pillow in an agony of remorse.

It was no good calling Toinette.

Everard turned the key in the lock and slowly got out of his clothes.

There was a tiny bathroom out of his bedroom and once the boy shut himself in he was like a hermit cut off from the world. He never went into the other part of the house unless requested to do so by his father or mother. He had made the bedroom his own territory and had fitted it up just as he liked. There were long, low Oxford chairs, quantities of books, one or two quaint bits of china, several reproductions of drawings by Sime and on the mantelpiece a group of photographs, none of them men's. On a table by the bed were pipes, tobacco, cigarettes, matches and an electric reading lamp.

The sound of water filling the bath came from the next room. He lit a cigarette and glanced round. The books and pictures and photographs looked down upon him as if he had never been away. The subdued murmur of the traffic in the square below came in through the window as it had been going on all the time and would go on forever, though earthquakes happened across the narrow channel. Nothing seemed to make any difference. Things just went on.

The bath was ready. He slipped in with a sigh of re-

The Hour of Conflict

lief and lay soaking. Finally he dried himself, put on a dressing gown, combed his hair, filled and lit a pipe and looked round the room again.

His hand wandered along the backs of the books, hovered over Kim, passed Mason, Locke and Du Maurier and then dropped heavily as it touched De Maupassant.

He sat down in an armchair. The wall faded and he saw a little white room with a crucifix and a picture of the Madonna and a great fat man with twitching hands crumpled up beside a white bed. And there on the bed Toinette, cold, her hands crossed reverently on her breast, and a piece of seaweed dangling from her shoe buckle.

The boy shivered and pressed a hand over his eyes. It was no good. The hand fell limply away and he sat, his chin on his chest, gazing blankly, thinking, thinking. He went over the whole thing again and again, his arrival and dismay at the empty prospect before him. He saw Marthe and Jeanne smoking on the patch of grass. He heard the little love song coming nearer and nearer along the road in the dim light.

Every detail of her, every look and gesture and expression came back to him. The adorable hours in the sand dunes, the feel of her when he held her tight. . . . God, what would he not give to put back the clock, to know that *this* was all a bad dream!

But there was the seaweed dangling from her shoe buckle and he was fifty times a cad and blackguard and a murderer. He stood up quickly. What was he to do? . . . What could he do? He had killed her. There was no returning.

He felt oppressed, stifled, and went again to the window and gulped in the air.

The Hour of Conflict

He felt once more terribly alone, but now, it was different, worse. He felt afraid at being alone with this awful thing on his mind. He was filled with a craving to confide in somebody, to share the appalling knowledge which weighed him down. To keep it to himself was impossible. He must go out and find some one and tell it, speak it aloud, pour it forth.

He wanted to hide behind sympathy, to feel that some one else knew what he had done and did not shrink away. He wanted . . . as it were an accomplice after the fact, who would remain silent while he laid his soul bare and tried by so doing to regain some self-respect.

He felt that he would go mad if he kept it locked up in him. He couldn't go on. He couldn't face it another day by himself.

A tap on the door broke into the maelstrom of his thoughts.

"Well?"

The handle rattled.

Everard unlocked the door.

The man came in. "Will you be dining here to-night, sir?"

"Yes."

"Very good, sir. Will you have it here or downstairs, sir?"

"Are my father and mother dining?"

"No, sir."

"Then I'll have it downstairs."

"Very good, sir." The door closed quietly.

His father and mother! He had forgotten them. They were so remote, so entirely in a separate existence of their own that they never entered into his calculations

The Hour of Conflict

except in so far as money was concerned. Now he snatched at the thought of them with a pitiful readiness. Other men made pals of their father and mother. Other men confided everything to them gladly and before any one else in the world. He had never been able to do so because he was not wanted. He knew that. He knew that he was an accident, a regrettable mistake. But now perhaps things might be different. Perhaps he had not tried to make them alter their opinion about him.

This was the turning point. For the first time in his life he needed his father and mother. He wanted to see love in their eyes when he entered the room. He wanted to feel that he was not shut out.

He slipped out of his dressing gown and put on his evening clothes. Yes. He would go down and wait up for them. He would see if there was no little thing he could do for them when they got back. He would begin to try and break down the barrier.

He caught up his cigarette case and went down to dinner in the big, silent room with hope in his heart.

CHAPTER III

AND at last his mother had come, and the man, and this was the end of his long, eager vigil! He had sat up all those hours determined not to go to bed until he should have made them see that he wanted to start again, to share their interests, to be of, and not merely among, them — and this was the result.

Something like despair, an utter hopelessness, cloaked him round as he closed the door on his mother and the man Wilmerton and went slowly upstairs to his room.

The man's smile had been so flagrant, and to know that his mother was such a woman came upon him like a great fist shooting out of the shadows. He had known that there was something going on in their curious house but it had always been muffled, screened off. To-night was the first time he had ever come face to face with it. He had known that his father and she merely lived under the same roof, never meeting on terms of intimacy, but now he saw everything with new eyes. While his mother brought this man home, his father was amusing himself — the expression was Mrs. Leyden's — elsewhere. The coldbloodedness of the phrase sickened him. It was so palpable that their whole lives were a sham, that anything one of them did was a matter of total unconcern to the other.

“No wonder I am their son!” The thought brought a bitter laugh. “No wonder I've done . . .”

He could expect nothing from his mother. There was

The Hour of Conflict

not the remotest possibility of his ever being able to confide in her. She was "amusing" herself.

Utterly weary, he went along to his room. His clothes had been unpacked and put away, the corner of the bed-clothes turned down, his brushes laid out on the dressing table.

His eyes took in the tidiness at a glance. The two shirt cases stood back to back in a convenient corner and on the outside one in large black letters on a white label was the word Wimereux.

For minutes it held him fascinated, staring at it. All the colour had left his face and one hand was clenched at his side. Wimereux — where *he* had "amused" himself! He was appalled by the thought that if he had ever opened his heart to his mother she would have laughed at him. He could hear the scorn and boredom in her voice as she answered, "Silly child! She ought to have known that you were only amusing yourself."

The pale chilly dawn came creeping in through the windows. The grey roof tops were wet and dreary and the vague street noises were like the yawns of the waking day. One by one the boy's clothes dropped from him. He flicked off the light, pulled down the blind, climbed into bed and closed his eyes. . . .

The tide was out and a high wind made the rushes lean all one way on the dunes. Tiny sand slides rustled and shivered down the hollows and along the digue, clouds of sand suddenly rose up and swirled wildly for a moment and then sank down again.

The moon was up, a great big circle of a moon that splashed the still sea with lights, countless little patches that danced and shimmered. And in the white emptiness Everard was hurrying along to the rendezvous in the

The Hour of Conflict

dunes. There was no reason for him to hurry. He knew that she would be there. But he felt that something was trying to keep him back, to head him off, to prevent him from getting there.

Every step forward seemed to take him two back as though he were walking against a moving platform. The sand took a malicious delight in swirling into his eyes, and tiny hands tugged at him from behind.

Suddenly a great fat man dashed past him, frantic and sobbing, searching wildly in every clump of rushes. He was followed by a tow-headed child who clapped her hands in glee and pointed and made faces and then turned to Everard and beckoned him on. A sense of blind anger filled him. What were they doing here? They had no right. The dunes were his—and hers. He stepped off the moving platform then and the hands ceased tugging and, mouthing strange things, he ran like the wind to try and get there first. But the big fat man kept ahead and ever the child danced after laughing and urging the boy to hurry. The air was filled with their sobs and laughter and curses until it seemed that the whole countryside must hear them and wake. At last the man disappeared over a hillock and a terrible cry stopped the boy as if he had been turned to stone, his hands pressed over his mouth, his eyes staring. The sand trickled into his shoes and the wind blew his hair about, but although he had run so far he was not hot or panting. He saw the elfin child shriek with laughter and clap her hands noiselessly. Then she turned and came back to him and pulled him by the hand towards the spot where the cry had come from.

At last he found himself standing on the brink of the sand pit and the wind stopped and all was very still ex-

The Hour of Conflict

cept for the child who leered at him and danced about in her cheap print frock and broken boots. Everard's eyes fastened upon her feet and he found himself counting her steps and admiring her grace and fairylike movements. At last she stopped and pointed. He turned and looked down.

The sand and the rushes and the child disappeared. He was in the white room standing beneath the crucifix and the Madonna. There was something on the bed. A great wave of longing to see what it was surged through him and he dashed forward and plucked away the fat man down whose greasy cheeks large tears chased each other without ceasing.

Toinette's hands were crossed reverently upon her breast and her beautiful dark eyelashes were fast upon her icy cheek which was pillowed upon tangled masses of wet black hair.

The boy's heart stopped beating. Why was she lying like that? Why didn't she wake and smile up at him and stretch out her arms? Why was there such a breathless silence? Why . . .

Her eyes opened and met his. She shrank away from him and in a voice which came from very far she said, "You cannot kiss me; I am dead. . . ."

The boy gave a great cry and started awake, trembling and cold, with beads of perspiration upon his face.

Dead! Yes, she was dead and he . . . In the grey light of a wet dawn his brain began to stumble round and round the terrible circle as a caged rat treads his wheel.

CHAPTER IV

“**I** BELIEVE our Heverard’s done somethink.”

The man servant, who had been christened Herbert Percival Robinson, Herbert after his father who on Saturday nights shouted “Buy! Buy! Buy!” outside a greengrocer shop in Lower Tooting; and Percival after a mysterious uncle who had emigrated steerage to America and who, it was rumoured, had made or was making a vast fortune in something or other,—dropped this cryptic remark as he sat down on the arm of a chair occupied by the housemaid and kissed the tip of her nose.

If he hadn’t been called Percival he would never have been able to do this. But at the early age of fifteen the man had realised the wonderful asset that this uncle might be to him and this kiss was only one of the things it had enabled him to do. As a matter of fact, the uncle had died years ago of an excess of zeal in an East-Side drinking saloon in New York. To do him justice, however, Herbert only surmised that he was no longer alive. There were no proofs. Even if there had been he would certainly have secreted them. The uncle was far too valuable to be allowed to die. So, as it was, he used him with a clear conscience.

“Yes,” he continued dreamily, “I think our Heverard’s been up to somethink on ’is last little jaunt across the Channel.”

“You ought to have been a Sherlock Holmes, Mr. Robinson, that you did!” said the maid.

The Hour of Conflict

Herbert smiled and waved his hand. "When you look at me like that," he said, "you're askin' for it, positively askin' for it."

The girl giggled and there was nothing determined in the struggle she made not to be kissed again. She, too, was not without street arab intelligence and she had decided that the best way to land her fish was with the give-a-little-one-minute-and-take-it-all-back-the-next kind of bait. She had learned a lot by experience. So many others avoiding the look, had merely swallowed the bait whole and gone away. This time she was taking no chances. In her heart of hearts she disbelieved in Robinson's uncle; but she appreciated the man's cleverness in using him and kept her scepticism well hidden.

Also she liked Everard. To her he was the ideal gentleman in the way he wore his clothes, did his hair and spoke. In her own good-hearted way she tried to show her appreciation of him by being extra careful with his room. She brushed and cleaned and arranged and tidied until Everard could have torn his hair with rage. It was only natural, therefore, that Robinson's remark should arouse her curiosity.

"Look here," she said, "stop fooling for a minute, Mr. Robinson, do, and tell me what you mean about Mr. Heverard."

Robinson desisted with a quiet sniff. He looked at her cryptically and continued after a moment. "You may have noticed that I am a keen student of human nature, though I says it who shouldn't, and when you ask me what's the matter with our Heverard, I says watch him, that's all; watch him! and you being a sceptic maybe you says Why? Thereupon I picks you up and says, because if you do you'll see that he's got some-

The Hour of Conflict

think on his chest, somethink pretty 'eavy, too. 'E's always thinking so 'ard that he never 'ears what you says to him first go off. And did he used to do that? No. It's only become a habit since his return from that there Wimeroo."

"I don't see that that means anything much."

Robinson raised his eyebrows and looked critically at his finger nails. One of them needed slight attention. He produced a pocket knife and began to scrape underneath it. "P'raps," he said, "and p'raps not. But when a man takes to thinkin' with a four-wrinkle frown on him 'e can only be doing one of two things."

"And what are they?" asked the girl.

"Either 'e's thinking forward as to 'is career an' subsequent prospects as dependent on the rise or fall of the market, which in the case of our Mr. Heverard is imposs, or else 'e's thinking back to some event of importance. The only such you and me knows of was what I gathered at dinner some time back as to 'is being shot out of Oxford. But that ain't worth four wrinkles." He shut the penknife with a click of contempt for the university, rubbed his nails on his coat sleeve and stood up with his back to the fireplace. "You talk about Sherlock Holmes with scorn in your voice," he went on, "but you wouldn't do yourself no 'arm if you studied 'im as I 'ave. It's taught me 'ow to deduct things, and applyin' what I've picked up from Sherlock to our Heverard I deduct that 'e's in love and is eatin' 'is 'eart for 'er — she probably doing likewise in France for 'im."

The girl clasped her hands together. "How romantic!" she said. "It's just like a piece out of that Heartsease book I'm reading."

Robinson looked at her. "Thank you for the infor-

The Hour of Conflict

mation," he said drily. "Now if you looks careful when you do 'is room out, like as not you'll find a photo of her somewhere. And if you do, mind you come and tip me the office. I'd like a peep at 'er — he's got it so bad, and," he added, studying the ceiling, "I've got an eye for a bit of goods myself."

The maid preened herself. Robinson would have bet on her doing so.

The bell rang. The man instantly straightened himself and did up the last button of his waistcoat. He always kept it undone when not in the presence of his employers in order to prevent its wrinkling.

He turned at the door. "You mark my words," he said. "We shall 'ave 'im going off again to join her before 'e's very much older."

The door closed behind him and at once Robinson became a new creature. He resumed his aitches and lost his Lower Tooting accent and held himself with all the ramrodism of a man who has served his time in the Army. The ring had come from his master's study. He tapped respectfully on the door and went in.

"You rang, sir?" His enunciation was perfect, almost unctuous.

The old man had just wakened from his afternoon nap. "Just see if Mr. Everard is in the house and if so, ask him to be good enough to come down."

"Very good, sir."

Robinson made his way up the stairs in a rather thoughtful frame of mind. "Narsty tone in the old boy's voice," he thought to himself. "Looks as if our Heverard was going to cop it. Now I wonder . . ."

In answer to his knock Everard said, "What is it?"

Robinson went in. He thought he detected a slight

The Hour of Conflict

untidiness about the boy's hair. "Your father's compliments, sir, and he would like to see you in his room."

Everard looked up at him quickly. "My father?" he said. "When does he want me?"

Robinson's detective instincts were roused to the fullest pitch by the boy's look. But his face remained a blank.

"Now, sir," he answered quietly.

"All right," said Everard.

As soon as he was outside the door Robinson's hand moved mechanically to his waistcoat button. "That's what it is," he murmured triumphantly. "The old man's found out about the little French donah and Heverard don't know it. Stand by for fireworks!"

But inside the room Everard had made no movement. He was arguing to himself, wondering whether there was the least hope of being able to ask his father's advice and help. A whole day had dragged by since he had met his mother on her return from the ball, a day of loneliness with no companion but remorse which dogged him relentlessly whether he tried to read or whether he went forth into the crowded London streets.

His mother was merely some one in the house,—and that not very much. Hitherto his father had been the same. But now that he had sent for him, here was Everard's chance. He had an odd feeling, a sort of presentiment that the moment had come when the wretched barriers might be broken down and the road cleared for an understanding between them. He wanted it, longed for it and sprang up in confident anticipation that all would be well. There was a glint of determination in his eye and his heart beat excitedly, nervously, as he went out of the room.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was no answer when Everard tapped at his father's door. He knocked again and then there was a movement and a querulous "Come."

The sound of that voice was like a bucket of icy water down Everard's neck. He tried hard not to feel as he always felt when summoned to that room,—uneasy, not quite sure of how he was to be greeted, as if he had committed an indiscretion in tapping.

He went quietly in and shut the door.

"Oh, it's you, is it? You've only kept me waiting twenty minutes, that's all."

Everard moved into the room. All the excitement and hope were crushed. The old antagonism surged to the top, intensified a hundred times by the harshness of such a greeting at the moment when, for the first time, he really wanted to open out.

"I'm sorry," he said shortly. It was useless to enter into explanations.

His father was deep in an armchair—one of those luxurious things which has a movable back, a foot rest, a slot in which to place a tumbler and a reading stand on a pivot. He smiled with polite sarcasm. It seemed incredible that the relationship of these two should have been that of father and son. They might easily have been taken for grandfather and grandson. The figure in the chair was limp, the hands thin and blue veined, the bones of the knees very sharply pronounced. The

The Hour of Conflict

face was unpleasant. The mouth was hard and sneering, the eyes dull and watery with great pouches beneath them. The skin was of an ivory tint, and seemed stretched very tight across his wrinkled forehead and sunken cheeks. The dark wavy hair was an anachronism. You felt that something was wrong, that Time, whose fingers had traced on his face lines so deep that no message could remove them, had forgotten to complete its work. But it did not need a more experienced eye than Everard's to detect the truth.

The boy made no move to shake hands with his father, nor did the old man seem to expect it. He just looked at him quizzically.

"Well?" he said at last. "You're not very communicative." He sniffed. "That's your mother coming out in you. Haven't you any bright conversation at your command?"

Everard moved restlessly. "You sent for me. Is there anything . . .?"

Mr. Leyden chuckled and propped his finger tips against each other. "Charming!" he said. "Truly delightful! If I hadn't sent for you, you mean that you wouldn't have come near me, eh?"

Everard made no answer. There was nothing to be said. But he looked curiously and critically at the old man, half amused at himself for feeling on his guard.

The tumbler in the arm of the chair was very nearly empty. Mr. Leyden looked at it distastefully. "Ring the bell and join me in a brandy and soda."

"Thank you." Everard crossed to the fireplace and put his finger on the electric button.

His father beamed at him, but there was a cynicism behind it which would not be repressed. "That's bet-

The Hour of Conflict

ter," he said. "If you don't talk you can at least drink, eh? By the way, is that why you were sent down from Oxford? Your mother told me quite casually, that is to say in her usual charming manner, that you had been rusticated, but beyond that she vouchsafed me no details. Now that you have become an entity — by having sufficient personality to get shot out of the University — it interests me to know something about you." He settled himself comfortably. "Tell me about it."

Everard smiled bitterly. The paradoxicality of his position struck him. Here he had come — four stairs at a time — in a fever to open up and tell this man, his father, everything. And now, although his father was asking, actually asking, to be told, the boy could not do so. He felt as though he were some strange insect under the magnifying glass, being examined with interest as a new specimen by a cold and critical professor. That was not the attitude to permit of confidences. It added another lock to his heart, another barrier to prevent their coming out.

The manservant entered.

Mr. Leyden waved a hand at his half-empty tumbler. "Two more," he said.

Robinson gave a quick searching glance at the two, took the glass from the arm of the chair and went over to the old oak sideboard. He was baffled by this calm. There were bottles and glasses of all colours and sizes. He put two tumblers on a tray with a bottle of brandy and a siphon and took them over to Mr. Leyden.

"The usual, sir?"

The man poured out nearly a tumblerful and added a suspicion of soda.

Everard helped himself — one finger.

The Hour of Conflict

Mr. Leyden took out his cigar case, carefully felt the half dozen that were in it and finally selected the fourth. This he punctured with a gold instrument and lit, waiting until the servant left the room.

“And you were sent down because . . .”

Everard shrugged his shoulders. “Oh,” he said, “it was just a rag of sorts and I happened to be caught.” He noticed his father’s sarcastic smile. “There was nothing psychological about it, I assure you.”

The old man blew quiet little clouds of smoke thoughtfully. “Well,” he said at length. “Perhaps you’re right. After all, why should a mere parent be told such things? May I be allowed to inquire when you go up again? But do sit down. To see you fidgeting about makes me uncomfortable.”

Everard took no notice of the request that was an order. He remained standing, one hand touching things on the mantelpiece. “I am not going up again,” he said.

“You mean . . . you were sent down for good?”

“No,” said Everard. “Only for one term.”

“Then your work . . . your degree?” The old man raised his eyebrows. “It seems to me that you carry a far too largely developed egotism about with you. You decide that you want to go to France, so without so much as by your leave or with your leave, you sneak off and stay just as long as suits your convenience. Now, in the blandest manner in the world, you say, ‘I am not going back to Oxford.’ Am I not to know even the reason of this? Must I just accept it without comment?”

“I’ve had enough of Oxford,” said Everard. “What is there to go back for? I don’t want a degree. Any fool can get a degree if he crams so many hours a day.

The Hour of Conflict

And what's the good of it when you've got it? It's just a harmless vanity, that's all. Besides . . . I couldn't stick Oxford. I couldn't face the monotony of it, the childishness. I've . . . grown up since I came down."

Mr. Leyden took up his drink and sipped it. "Your explanation, though doubtless interesting, does not enlighten me as to the reason. Perhaps . . ."

Everard swung round and looked the old man straight in the face. "What do *you* care whether I go back or whether I go to the devil? You sit there like a cat playing with a mouse, shooting off your damned sarcasms! What do you want to know for? What *right* have you to know? You call yourself my father! What have you ever done for me except to make me afraid of you as a kid, and to make me hate and loathe this house every time I come into it. You talk about egotism. Who else have I had to rely on except myself? I tell you I'm not going back to Oxford, and if you don't like it—well, don't, and be damned to you!" The door slammed.

Mr. Leyden started and burnt himself with his cigar. He rubbed the place thoughtfully for a moment. Then he stroked his face, wetted his finger and smoothed his eyebrows.

"H'm!" he muttered. "He can be communicative after all!"

CHAPTER VI

THE sun was shining again after two days of rain, shining hotly and insistently with no lurking cloud in the sky to make the pessimist shake his head and murmur bitter things about climate. It was a morning when sparrows chirped shrilly and refused to turn a feather when earthquaking omnibuses missed them by an inch as they sought a breakfast in the middle of the road. Errand boys blew piercing blasts through their teeth and cheeked chauffeurs as the breeze stirred the quiffs under their mis-shapen caps. For some reason which they could not define they felt full of life as they stepped out along the pavements, with a grin for all the world.

The sun was shining and all the sombre tints of the old city fled at its touch. Straw hats and gay frocks flashed in the streets and there was a feeling of cheery content in the rumble of traffic, the cracking of whips, the hooting of motors. It was like a wave of electricity which ran down all the streets touching everybody, penetrating every house.

Everard felt it as he dried himself after his bath and looked down from his window upon the sunny square. There were lines around his eyes which told of sleepless nights, but he moved briskly, filled with a new determination, as he brought out his golf suit.

He rang the bell and took a deep breath. "Yes," he muttered. "I must pull myself together, chuck thinking and keep on the move. I'll go out and beat bogey and feel the sun on my face. Good old sun."

The Hour of Conflict

With elaborate care he chose a shirt,—the one shirt among all in the drawer that he “would be seen dead in a ditch in.” Yes. The idea was good. To keep going, not to let himself think—and with the resolve firmly in his mind he hurried into his shirt, chose an Oxford tie and concentrated all his mind on doing his hair.

The door opened and Robinson came in.

“Just bring me up something to eat, will you? Coffee and toast—anything that’s going.”

“Very good, sir.”

“Oh, and Robinson” . . . the man stopped. Everard spoke over his shoulder. “Just turn that suit case round.”

“Turn it round, sir?” Robinson was puzzled. Turn it round? He looked to see why. There was nothing the matter with the thing as it was. There were various labels pasted on, that was all,—Oxford, Wimereux, Henley, but why . . . He went across to it and picked it up with a curious glance at Everard, whose back was still towards him. “Like that, sir, do you mean?”

Everard turned. The labels did not show. “Thanks,” he said quickly. “That’s all right. As soon as you like with that breakfast.”

“Very good, sir.”

The door shut and Everard swallowed hard and began to fill a pipe fiercely, his lips formed for whistling. No sound came and he began to smoke and finished dressing, fussing with his collar, carefully brushing his coat before he put it on. He looked at his watch. Nine-thirty. There was a ten-thirty train he could catch. That was excellent. Dash the feller! Why didn’t breakfast come? He took out his golf clubs. They

The Hour of Conflict

were like bits of polished silver, but he routed out a rag of sorts — it was an old shirt — and rubbed them carefully.

There was a rap on the door.

“Thank God,” murmured the boy.

He hurriedly put the clubs back into the bag while Robinson brought in a tray, cleared a space for it on the table and went out again.

Within twenty minutes Everard had bolted his breakfast, collected money, pipe and a pouch full of tobacco and was out in the square with his clubs on his shoulder looking up and down for a taxi. He had not waited many seconds before a W. & G. slithered quietly round the corner in the distance and made a sudden quick rush in his direction. Everard nodded. The taxi stopped with the door handle an inch from his hand.

“Paddington,” said Everard.

The man touched his cap, jerked down the flag, heard the door bang and in a second was in Sloane Street playing poetically but meaningly upon his horn.

The boy had no paper to read, so he leaned forward smoking and become absorbed in the way the chauffeur sat casually back with one hand on the steering wheel, the other on the horn and missed carts and buses by fractions of an inch, took chances of getting outside other taxis and dodged like an eel. It was a beautiful piece of work. The man was an artist. He never used the horn unless he meant to move somebody and then he made it sound as if he were hammering the brains out of the offending driver. For people crossing the street he touched it quietly as if saying, “Look *out* now! Be *careful!*” and as though the thing possessed a sort of Piper of Hamelin quality every one listened

The Hour of Conflict

to it. He went round corners on his left ear at top speed and yet Everard was not bumped or hurled from side to side. He drew up behind a policeman's outstretched arm with his right mud flap brushing the constable's trouser leg,—and all the time, until he deposited Everard after a shute-the-shute rush down the departure side of Paddington Station, he never moved his head or body or was apparently conscious of anything.

Everard got out. "I think you ought to have a few lessons in driving," he said quietly, fishing in a handful of change for the right amount.

The chauffeur shot a quick look at him and then slowly his face wrinkled and two rows of very white teeth showed under his neat moustache in a delighted grin. He took his fare and touched his cap. "Thank you, sir."

Everard clanked into the station whistling resolutely. The day had begun well. He bought a ticket, a *Daily Mail* and all the weekly illustrated papers, climbed into a smoker and read diligently until the train puffed into West Drayton station.

No other golfers followed Everard down the station hill and his approach was signalled by a general rush of caddies, who had been scouting the train, back to the professional's shed.

Hitherto this was a club to which Everard only came in vacation, but when he left the well-kept putting green behind, with the collection of tired hens who sat about in the green rookery or roosted upon the backs of benches, and went into the club house, he found himself greeted warmly by the steward, who, in his shirt sleeves, bathed in perspiration, leaned on the bar and was studying the political news. He looked up as Ever-

The Hour of Conflict

ard came in and his face beamed. He held out an enormous hand. "Good morning, Mr. Leyden. This is a pleasant surprise. We 'aven't 'ad the pleasure of seeing you for many a long day. Been away?"

Everard smiled. "Yes," he said, "dodging about. How are you, Wolsey?"

The steward, whose only resemblance to the Cardinal whose name he bore was his gift of the gab, stood up straight and placed both hands on his enormous corporation, all his chubby fingers spread out. His eyes twinkled merrily. "Still buildin'," he replied, "still buildin'; shall I mix you a tiny one before going out?—Keeps the neck from swelling in this weather."

"Righto," said Everard. "Have one with me."

"Well, my neck swells a deal more than yours, so I will, thank you." Wolsey gave the boy a slant of his head and began to concoct the drinks.

By the time Everard had changed his shoes upstairs and returned they were side by side upon the bar. But the sun was calling outside and the itch for action was upon him. He took up his glass quickly. "Good luck," he said.

Wolsey took his up and eyed it appraisingly. "Same to you and many of 'em," he said. "Reminds me of the story of the Irishman who . . ."

Everard set down his glass with a bang and a very good imitation of a roar of laughter. Once Wolsey was fairly under way on stories, there was no escape. The flow was undammable. From his comfortable attitude, too, propped against the solid counter, it was all too palpable that he was ready for a prolonged session. Although the story was certain to be worth hearing the boy picked up his clubs and interrupted bravely.

The Hour of Conflict

"Save it till I get back to lunch," he said, and hurried out on the empty tee.

From the shed the caddies were all watching for him. He waved an arm. There was a moment's rustle and confusion and pushing and then a boy came running.

"Is the pro there?" asked Everard.

"Yes, sir."

"Just go and ask him if he can play round and then come and carry for me."

The boy was off again and Everard drew forth his driver and swung mightily. He had left his cap in the club house and the sun shone gloriously and in front of him the green was very green and well kept and inviting.

"Good morning, sir," said a cheery voice behind him and Everard saw the long thin professional stride over the railings and up on to the tee.

"Good morning," said Everard. "Great day for golf. Done any fine scores lately?"

The professional smiled. He reminded Everard curiously of the chauffeur who had driven him to Paddington.

"I got a sixty-eight yesterday," he said.

A picture of the different holes, long, flat, full of ditches and traps, floated through Everard's mind and he whistled. "Did you, though! That's useful," he said. "Well, let's see what we can do. You drive, will you?"

The professional teed his ball upon a diminutive pinch of sand, took a preliminary swing or two and then drove a long clear easy ball straight for the pin. Everard noted the absence of pressing, refrained from doing so himself and had the satisfaction of watching his ball follow the professional's down the straight.

The Hour of Conflict

"Fine ball, sir," said the professional, and the two went across the bridge over the bit of water in front of the tee.

Everard breathed deeply and held his face up to the sun. A Great Western express roared past on the raised embankment to the right and when it had gone there was only the sleepy whine of the mowing machine in the distance and the faint click of the clubs on the backs of the caddies as they followed. To the left, and in front and just behind, the horizon was bounded by trees waving gently in the soft breeze that made the leaves whisper to each other like . . . like . . . Everard wondered what it was that it reminded him of. He came up to his drive, only a few yards behind that of the professional and played his second with a mashie on to the green.

What *did* that rustle remind him of? It was so vague and elusive. He walked on trying to place it and suddenly he was once more on the links at Wimereux and the faint rustle was the rushes leaning over in the sea wind. There was the Café Tardot in front of him and at the window of his room the maid appeared, the little servant with the abortive giggle and the spectacles, and beyond that the sea was sparkling and dancing and a tiny puff of smoke to the right told of England.

A mischievous chuckle broke out behind him. Everard turned quickly and brushed his hand over his eyes. No, it was not Marthe! There were only the two dirty English boys with cheap cigarettes dangling from their mouths, and their heads together as they whispered something.

There seemed to be a cloud over the sun, or a film before his eyes, for when he took his putter the ball shot about ten yards over the hole into the rough.

The Hour of Conflict

He lost that hole, and the next and the next. The professional's conversation fell on deaf ears until at length he glanced curiously at the boy and kept silent. "Another of those sidey Oxford men!" and he sniffed.

If only it had been "side!" As it was the sound of Toinette's laugh was in his ears and his thoughts raced in French and every time he addressed the ball Toinette's face floated before his eyes.

Side! Every stroke was an agony. Every whisper of the leaves a note that tore his heart. . . . "Cain, Cain, what hast thou done with thy brother?" His hands were less clean than those of Cain. The eye of remorse burnt into his soul.

At last he could stand it no longer. "Let's chuck it," he said. "I . . . I can't play."

He turned quickly on his heel and walked away—anywhere to get away from people, away from himself, away from what he had done.

But though he walked for hours hatless in the sunny Middlesex lanes, seeing nothing of the birds which scurried out of hedges at the crunch of his feet and flew away over the seas of green cabbages, or the far off glint of water as some bubbling streamlet flashed for a second as it twisted around a bank, or yapping dogs which barked at him from cottage yards, he was not alone.

Remorse kept pace for pace with him under the elm trees and leaned by his side when at last he leant his arms on a white farmyard gate, miles from anywhere and breathed her name into the empty silence with an inarticulate cry for forgiveness.

CHAPTER VII

AT about half-past eight that night Everard might have been seen walking hard along Ealing Broadway, head up, shoulders down, sweating profusely.

He was returning to London on foot because he loathed the idea of puffing into ghastly suburban stations and sitting next to ghastly suburban people when the need for physical action was still strong in him. So he had returned to the club for his cap and tramped the dusty roads at a steady four miles an hour.

Electric tramcars clanged along the Broadway and Everard stared curiously at the people who pushed and surged and elbowed on the pavement. They were new to him, these boys with high collars and made-up ties of egregious colours, who sloped up and down eyeing the girls who themselves were elaborately hatted, though down at heel, and self-conscious and giggling. All the shops looked cheap, bicycle shops which sold everything but bicycles, gramophone shops through whose open doors came tinny music to which listened groups of cigarette-smoking louts, sweet shops blazing lights, and cinematograph places with uniformed attendants who added to the street noises by crying the attractions in raucous aitchless voices, and drew attention to the highly coloured posters of bronco-busters, tramps and train collisions.

Everard found himself reminded of something. Although he had never been to such a place before, they

The Hour of Conflict

were somehow familiar, these shop boys and girls with their cheap tie pins and fake rings. For a time he could not gather how it was that he should have the feeling of having been there before, almost as if it were in some vaguely remembered previous existence. It annoyed him and then in a flash he knew, and smiled. It was of course the district which H. G. Wells had made his own and these were the types which he knew and described so intimately.

To read about them was one thing, but to be in the middle of them, to hear their inane laughter and be jostled by them was quite another. Their atmosphere was depressing and Everard was glad when the lights of the Broadway were left behind and the streets became almost empty again. But with every mile he covered suburbanism became more solid and oppressive. Every breath that he took into his lungs filled him with a greater dislike of his surroundings, a sense of uneasiness and mental discomfort. He began to regret that he hadn't caught the train at West Drayton after all. He was a fool and it served him right.

In addition to having walked heaven knows how many miles in a hot sun he had had nothing since breakfast except the drink before starting out to play golf. His legs felt like lead and his stomach cried aloud with the yearning for food. Coupled with the dreariness of the outskirts of Acton, these physical discomforts were more than he could stand. He began to look out for a taxi. Many passed him, but they were occupied, and when finally he found one his temper was very much on edge.

He stood with the door open, one foot on the step. Home? At that moment he wouldn't have gone home for anything on earth. He didn't want silence and smug, tidy

The Hour of Conflict

rooms with books that had lost their flavour and a haunting desolation about the place. He craved light and colour and noise.

"Drive to the Savoy," he said, and slammed the door after himself.

The starting of the car jerked him back into his seat and he pulled out his cigarette case.

"Damn!" he muttered. The thing was empty. He rammed it impatiently back into his pocket and pulled out his pipe and then remembered that golf clothes were hardly the things to wear at the Savoy. Where the deuce should he go? Why in thunder had he been such a complete ass? If he had taken the train back and changed he could have been in the Savoy at this moment. Was it good enough to go back now and change? He'd be shot if he would! So he put his head out of the flying taxi and the wind made him grab at his cap and then blew a speck of tobacco into his eye so that the astonished chauffeur suddenly heard close to his ear a string of heated and well-known words.

"Chuck the Savoy," shouted Everard. "Gambrinus, Regent Street."

The chauffeur waved an arm and nodded his head in sign of comprehension and did not check his pace. It was as though he, too, were impelled by a desire to get back into civilisation.

It was nearly ten o'clock when a ravenous Everard hurried into the beer hall, made his way to a corner table where he was facing into the room and gave a quick order to the waiter. As yet the place was not very full. The people who made it their club, who came night after night, did not arrive till after the theatre, but there were lots of foreigners with fancy hair who

The Hour of Conflict

talked shrilly and gave toasts, and smoked incessant cigarettes, and suburban women whose eyes sparkled as they held a lighted cigarette which from time to time they ventured to puff and imagined themselves in Bohemia as they found themselves at the next table to painted girls who smoked like chimneys and ordered double whiskies at the expense of their glossy and very young escorts.

It was very noisy, and the electric fans whining in corners churned up the clouds of smoke which hung blue along the ceiling. The general effect was not unforeign,—the plaques painted with German flags and mottos, the steins and pewters dotted along the shelf at the top of an oak panelling, the crush and bustle, the Hebraic nose which was everywhere. Every second the door opened, giving a dark glimpse of gloomy Glasshouse Street, and more people came in, girls at twenty shillings a week who hadn't waited to take off their make-up, nancy men in flat-brimmed bowlers with black on their eyelashes and soft shirts who were obviously what they appeared to be, musicians from theatre orchestras, one or two couples in evening clothes who hadn't felt like the prim Carlton band.

Everard was entrenched behind weird-looking slices of sausages, gherkins and piccalilli, a plate of black bread and an enormous light bock, when a voice that had laughter in it and unquenchable optimism suddenly made him look up. "Hullo! Leyden, by all that's great. Good e-nough!"

The speaker was a tall, thin man with a shock of wild red hair, unspeakable clothes, a tie that sagged away from his collar and a grin that caught you by the neck and made you chortle without any reason.

The Hour of Conflict

Everard looked him over and chortled too. The freak was still beaming at him, but beyond a sort of hazy remembrance of having met the man somewhere in another world, Everard could not place him.

"Hullo!" he said. "What will you drink? I don't know who the blazes you are and I'm perfectly certain I've never met you. One couldn't forget a face like that."

Red Hair flung out a laugh. A passing waiter dropped a coffee cup. It emptied itself down the back of a man who had all the appearance of being a Greek. He was not. His language gave him away. He leaped to his feet with a yell—"Sacré bon sang!" He turned on the petrified waiter. "Espèce de vache! Qu'est-ce que vous foutez à me flanquer des tasses de café dans le dos, quoi? Zut alors!" He sat down, wiping himself with one hand, gesticulating like a flexible semaphore with the other, while his friends who had seen the why of everything laid their heads on the table and shrieked with futile mirth.

The waiter crept away and told a colleague, "Qu'il en était encore tout emotionné! Ce grand roux . . . là bas tiens! Son rire est comme un coup de canon! Oh, Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!"

Red Hair, unaware of the fact that he was the cause of the storm in the coffee cup pulled out the chair opposite Everard and sat down.

"Don't tell me I've faded from the annals of Oxford already," he said. "After such a funeral as that I thought we had broken all known records, especially as you . . ."

"Oh, by Jove, yes," broke out Everard. "Your face comes back to me through the fog of years."

The Hour of Conflict

"H'm, it generally does, especially at night time. Children dream about it."

Everard held out his hand. "My dear old Ruddy," he said. "How are you? . . . Here, waiter! Bring two more steins . . . light beer for you? . . . light beer, waiter! . . . and will you eat? This sausage is great . . . no, all right, just beer and cigars."

Fancy meeting old Ruddy again like this. Everard was delighted. He remembered organising the "funeral" at the end of his first year for this man, Martin Laleham, who had at once been baptised into his college as the Ruddy Burger. The reason of his being shot out made him laugh once more. Ruddy, after a crew dinner, had climbed into the wrong college in a state of great cheeriness and vocabulary activity and mistaking the Dean of that college for a scout of his own, had used phrases in description of his personal appearance and habits which had caused the venerable Dean to take grave umbrage.

"I suppose you're still up, doing yourself top hole, as usual?" Ruddy pulled his chair round so that he was also facing into the hall and produced a pencil and several old letters.

"No," said Everard. "I had a funeral half way through last term."

Ruddy was making vivid sketches of all the types at the other tables.

"Great work!" he said. "By Jove, I'm jolly grateful they chucked me so early in the proceedings. I hate to think of all the time that runs to waste up there—I don't mean just *time*, but good time, enjoyment of every moment, life. They don't begin to know what life means at Oxford."

The Hour of Conflict

"What are you doing then?" said Everard. "You don't look as if you were weighed down with money."

Ruddy grinned. "Money? My dear chap, I haven't got a bean! Who cares a damn about money? My father, bless him, was so cut up and shirty about my getting sent down, *and* in such circumstances—he's a parson, you know—that he wouldn't make me any allowance. Told me I must go forth and atone." He roared with laughter. "Poor old Pater, he's one of the very best, but hasn't got a grain of humour in his entire composition. Think of me—like this—" he made a gesture which included his quaintly ugly face, red hair and curious garments—"think of me atoning."

Everard joined him in the laugh. The idea was unthinkable. This man oozed the joy of living. It spread round him in a sort of cloud. Everything he did showed him alive with vitality—the sparkle in his eyes, the ready laughter, the quick jokes, the way he swept a hand through his unruly hair, the way he drank his beer, jerked his tie into something like position and talked eagerly and roared at everything he said.

"Look here," he said. "This is what I'm doing." He put a hand in his pocket and produced a bundle of stuff all dogeared and torn. "'Course the prices are scandalous. Every editor's a born thief, but thank God they know when they've got a good thing. Look at that. Isn't it good? There's no question of bucking. I *know* it's good and the blighters gave me six and eight for it. Six shillings and eight pence! Think of it. Why in a year they won't be able to get me for sixty sovereigns. . . . Look at this . . . and that. My dear chap, I ask you, aren't they great?"

Everard carefully smoothed out the bits of paper

The Hour of Conflict

which Ruddy Laleham thrust under his nose and studied the black and white drawings. Even to a man who knew nothing more about drawing than whether a thing amused or interested him or not, they were arresting. Every line was full of humour and there was a masterly boldness in the way lines were left out. They were great and he said so. The artist seized them in a large hand and rammed them back into his pocket and buried his head in his stein.

"What are *you* doing?" he said.

Everard's eyes slipped away from Ruddy's face. "Me?" he said. "Oh, I'm . . . er, reading for the Bar. Tell me," he went on quickly, handing his friend a cigar, "how long have you been doing these drawings?"

Ruddy lit up. "Ever since I came down. My dear feller, I've had the time of my life. The amount of stuff I've done is simply unbelievable and the humour of it is that for the first six months every blessed drawing I sent in was returned." He threw back his head and laughed at the remembrance of it.

"Bad luck," said Everard sympathetically.

"Bad luck?" Ruddy echoed the words. "That's where the scream comes in. Would you believe it, I've used the lot since, and with the very asses who were ass enough to send them back! Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it?"

Everard looked curiously at this big light-hearted creature who thoroughly enjoyed every second of his work and took things just as they came with a shout of laughter whether rough or smooth. He was palpably only just pulling through. His clothes cried that aloud and from his thinness it was a matter of question whether

The Hour of Conflict

he always had enough to eat. And yet his eyes twinkled and there was nothing without its humorous side. What was the secret of it all?

"I suppose you're beginning to make money now?" he said.

"When masterpieces like the things I showed you fetch something like seven bob each, the word is beginning. As a matter of fact, we just keep out of debt and that's all. But you wait! Before you can say knife, I shall get my foot into the editorial door and then they'll sit up. I'm absolutely brimming over with ideas that'll hit this old city right in the neck."

Everard hardly heard the last of his remarks. The word "we" had caught his ear and he was wondering whether the colossal optimist who snapped his fingers in the face of poverty had had the cheek — there was no other word for it — to get married.

"Tell me, Ruddy," he said, "when you say 'we' do you use the word editorially?"

"Eh? . . . Lord, no. When I say we I mean we — Angy and I. I don't know what the deuce I should have done without her. She's a snorter, old boy, one of God's own angels . . . which reminds me. What's the time? I promised to get back by eleven o'clock. She's been looking after a pal of hers who's ill."

Everard pulled out his watch. "It's a quarter to twelve," he said.

Ruddy jumped. "What!" he said. "Great Scott! I shall have to sprint. I *am* a brute. She's probably been worrying her head off for the last three quarters of an hour, poor little kid. Forgive my dashing off like this, Leyden, old man, but you see how it is. Look here, come and hunt me up. My studio — fine word,

The Hour of Conflict

studio, what? is in Brewer Street, just round the corner here. Number two hundred. We're 'at home' any hour of the day and night. Don't forget. Two hundred. Many thanks."

He waved a hand, with all his teeth showing, jammed a shabby straw on his head, picked his way through the tables and disappeared at a run through the door into Glasshouse Street.

Everard puffed at his cigar and finished his beer and beckoned to the waiter. "How much do I owe you?"

"Four shillings and seex pence, M'sieur."

Everard gave him a half sovereign.

"When you bring my change let me have a pencil and a bit of paper."

When they came he wrote down the address of the studio with a smile.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE are few things in London which draw the imagination as much as Mercury in Piccadilly Circus at night. In broad sunlight he is just a thing of bronze, a rather nice thing in his way, but nothing more. By night, however, when he is merged in the darkness and you only see him outlined against the sky, he comes once more into his godhead,—a kindly god, thought Everard, who, having observed some vile creature of the night lurking on the other side of the Circus, had flown swiftly with drawn bow to rid us poor earth creatures of its influence.

The boy stood on the corner after he had emerged from the stuffy beer house and looked up at him. He noticed with a smile that his arrow was pointed full at the brawny chest of a policeman, who, all unconscious of being a target, was blowing his nose into a red bandana handkerchief.

It was a glorious night, warm and starry and a great moon floated over the buildings as if it had paused in its flight and was gazing speculatively down at all the lights, listening to the clatter of motor buses and the fierce horns of taxicabs and wondering whether Mercury's aim were as good as ever after the many centuries that had passed since first they made acquaintance in other lands.

A rush of taxis held him up. He was about to cross over into Piccadilly when he became aware of an odd tapping at his side. He looked round quickly and saw a

The Hour of Conflict

little old woman with a shade over her eyes and a placard on her chest who also waited a chance to cross over.

"Let me give you a hand," he said. "Which way do you want to go?"

The old woman stretched out a hand and turned her head in the direction of his voice. "Thank you kindly," she said. "I'm makin' for Lower Regent Street, sir, but, oh, them taxi-kebs is enough to frighten the lives out of ordinary people, let alone me." She gave a little chuckle.

Everard caught her elbow, helped her off the curb and conducted her safely across, past the policeman, who had finished blowing his nose, and saw her safely to the corner of the desired street.

"There you are," he said. "Straight down."

"Thank you, sir. Thank you kindly. Would you buy a pair of shoe laces, or a box of matches?" She held out a selection on a tray.

Everard noticed her dirty bare toes through her boots and her hair streaked with silver under the faded old bit of a bonnet. "Poor little old devil," he thought. "What a life!"

"That's a good idea," he said. "I'll have a box of matches, thanks." He took one and pulled out all the money he had in his pocket and put it into her grimy wrinkled hand. "Good night and good luck."

There was almost a sob in her voice as, feeling that he had given her more than enough, she thanked him. Everard turned and walked away. He was bound for home and bed and the thought of a taxi came to him with delight. He had not taken six steps when he heard a shrill voice, "Sir! Sir!"

The Hour of Conflict

The little old woman was calling him frantically.

He turned and went back. "Here I am. What is it?"

The match seller whose placard bore the word Blind in big black letters, held out her hand with the money still in it. "You've . . . you've made a mistake, sir." There was fierce excitement in her voice and she was breathing heavily as if she had had a physical struggle. She took up one of the coins. "You didn't mean to give me this." She held out a sovereign.

"Yes, that's all right," said Everard. "Mind you don't lose it. Good night."

The little old woman broke down and sobbed openly and called after him shrilly as he strode away, "Gawd bless you, sir. May you never feel the loss of it. May you never . . ." she broke off and began muttering to herself, "a quid, a blessed thick un, Gawd bless him." Tears ran down her cheek and she fished somewhere in her clothing and brought out a few pennies wrapped in a rag and put Everard's money with them and tapped her way along, clasping it to her breast, muttering to herself all the time.

Everard lit his last cigar with his expensive box of matches, nodded good night to the policeman and shook his head at a beckoning taxi driver.

Eaton Square. He groaned. It was miles away and he had given her his last halfpenny. He shrugged his shoulders and told himself he was all kinds of a fool and plugged gamely on. He began to wonder how blind people like that knew the feel of money. That old lady, for instance, whose honesty, come to think of it, was the most amazing thing that ever happened,— "I wouldn't have kicked up a fuss like that if some one had given *me*

The Hour of Conflict

a quid!"— she had picked out the sovereign from among all the other coins just as easily as he could have done. It was extraordinary. But perhaps she wasn't blind. Perhaps she was only one of the fakes who traded on the good-heartedness of the public, the old rotter!

And then, as he was beginning to grow sceptical and angry, he laughed. What did it matter after all whether she was blind or not? It was bad enough to be a woman on the streets selling matches with all the competition of the hundreds of others like her, and she was old into the bargain. "But," he added with a quiet chuckle, "it's a thousand to a gooseberry that she doesn't waste any of it on a bath."

He was still smiling to himself when somebody, turning out of St. James's Street suddenly, bumped into him.

"I beg your pardon," said Everard, jumping back.

"That's all right, dearie." The girl gave a little laugh and summed him quickly up with her big dark eyes. She was pretty,— or would have been if all the paint had been removed,— and her clothes were in excellent taste. Her teeth were very white. "Going for a little breather?" she said.

Everard laughed. The quiet way she had amused him, and then suddenly his eyes twinkled. "Not just now," he said. "I'm doggo. Look here, will you do me a great kindness?"

"Any little thing like that," she said.

"Well," said Everard, "will you be good enough to lend me twopence?"

The girl burst into a peal of laughter. "Lend you *tuppence?*" She looked him up and down, this quiet, well-groomed man in elaborate tweeds. "Lend you *tuppence!* What's the game?" she asked.

The Hour of Conflict

"No, it isn't a joke," said Everard. "Fact is I'd no notion of borrowing money till I bumped into you. I've just parted with my last cent and I want to sit down badly. But as I've also got to get to Sloane Street the only sensible place to sit down in is a bus. . . . Can you oblige me?"

"Delighted I'm sure," said the girl. She hauled up several yards of rope which attached her to a bead reticule, opened it and took out her purse. From this she produced a sixpence and solemnly handed it to Everard. "You can keep the change, dearie," she said.

"Thanks most awfully," said Everard. "It's frightfully nice of you and I can't say how . . ."

"Then don't," interrupted the girl. "I'm not asking you to."

"Look here, do you smoke cigarettes?"

"What do *you* think?"

"Well then,"—Everard pulled out the case that he had filled at Gambrinus. "Will you accept some of these? They're the best I could get." He emptied both sides with a quick thumb and finger. The girl took them.

"Seems to me we're a sort of blooming mutual benevolent society," she said.

"Ships that pass in the night, eh?" Everard held out his hand. This child was very human. "Good night and good luck," he said, unconsciously using the same words to her as he had used to that other waif of the streets.

"So long, dearie," said the girl. "Perhaps we shall barge into each other again somewhere. Who knows?" She smiled and passed on.

Everard leapt on to a passing bus. "I wonder," he thought to himself as he handed the money to the ticket

The Hour of Conflict

collector. "I wonder where that sixpence came from. Good Lord, it's a rummy world."

There was a certain poetic justice about it all which made this boy laugh as the bus trundled him down towards Knightbridge. He had given his all to a ragged crone and then borrowed a bus fare from a girl who in spite of her smart frock and elaborate make-up might very possibly be the crone's daughter.

The streets, unlike other Alma Maters, fit their graduates for very practical professions.

CHAPTER IX

TWO hundred Brewer Street!

The memory of the big, uncouth, red-haired optimist was responsible for the smile which spread over Everard's face as he slipped his key in the lock and went in. Two hundred Brewer Street! What a place to live in,—coster's barrows lining both sides of the street, the peel of every kind of fruit rotting in the gutters, noise, squalor, smells. And yet somehow the place seemed to be a good background for old Ruddy. He didn't care whether he lived in a slum. He didn't even know, for his exuberant high spirits and humour transformed the place into a kind of Garden of Eden, the only difference being—and here the artist would roar with laughter at his own joke—that you paid for your fruit before instead of afterwards.

And then Everard began to wonder what kind of a girl "Angy" must be. Not a bit ordinary, he thought. Plucky above the average and very, very much in love. To marry a man without a halfpenny and live in a garret, probably, in a neighbourhood like Brewer Street seemed to Everard to be the most amazing thing he had ever heard. Evidently she too was swept away by Ruddy's tremendous optimism and enthusiasm.

As soon as the door closed and the boy was home with consequently no more effort needed, all the tiredness that was in him surged round him in a wave and he faced the stairs with a groan. He murmured blessings on the head

The Hour of Conflict

of the girl of the streets and toiled one at a time up the creaking stairs. There were lights in the hall and from the dining room came the sound of several laughing voices, high above which rose a shrill feminine scream of joy.

It went through the boy like a knife. It was far more horrible than the screams of laughter of the girl who had lent him twopence and yet *she* would be looked upon as dirt by the woman in there who was his mother.

He stifled an immense yawn, and went into his bedroom, switched up the lights and locked the door. Bed was the thing. There was nothing else. . . . He paused and looked round quickly, with an odd tightening of his muscles. An uneasy feeling came over him which held him still, his hand on the switch. The room, once a haven of refuge, an oasis, seemed to have lost its friendliness. The book shelf with its much-thumbed volumes no longer had any call. The chairs no longer invited him to their comfortable depths. The very feel of the place had changed. It was as though the shadows concealed something.

He moved away from the door and began to throw off his clothes, whistling to break up the silence. From time to time, he shot almost furtive glances about the room, his fingers manipulating the buttons more and more unwillingly. At last he stopped undressing and deliberately loaded a pipe and lit it. In spite of his being dead tired he did not want to go to bed. He got into a dressing gown, picked up a book and stretched himself out in an armchair. Every night now he faced bed with increasing reluctance. He could no longer drop with a sigh of pleasure on to his pillow and be fast asleep in an instant. He lay awake and heard the quarters strike and when at

The Hour of Conflict

last, after tossing and turning, sleep came to him he was wafted across the Channel to Wimereux — not the old Wimereux full of brightness and keen air with cheery little Madame Tardot to waddle in while he was hungrily disposing of the morning coffee and nod “Bonjour” and bore him with her chatter about nothing at all; with the caddies rushing about and niblicking dirty golf balls in the rough grass and yelling impatiently at each other, “Oh, mais dites donc! . . .” “B’en quoi? . . .” “Ça n’ m’ touche pas! . . .” “B’en tu sais!” while motors crashed along the winding ribbon of road that bordered its course and lost itself over the top of the hill.

It was a Wimereux full of ambushes and lurking terrors through which Everard went fearfully. Every tuft of rushes was a snare and the sea broke viciously, striving to climb on to the digue and drag him down. The caddies gathered in quiet, large-eyed bunches and pointed at him meaningly. Madame Tardot, when she saw him, crossed herself and hurried in and shut fast the door. There were times when a finger would touch his elbow out of the darkness and Marthe, her eyes alight with glee would whisper, “Tiens! voyez-vous, dans la mer!” and he would turn quickly expecting he knew not what. And then she would mutter, “I thought it was Toinette!” Or he would be walking along the digue and suddenly Hippolyte Guerchard would appear in his shirt sleeves and Everard would hide and watch him; his face all stained with tears, searching, searching among the dunes.

And the boy would wake cold and trembling and would go on hearing the quarters strike with maddening calm and regularity.

The Hour of Conflict

As he sat in the long armchair fierce clouds of smoke came from his pipe and his book flopped at an unreadable angle. Every muscle ached. He rose quickly, turned on a hot bath and lay soaking for perhaps half an hour, to emerge with renewed courage. He dried himself quickly, turned off all the lights and got into bed.

For several minutes he lay motionless listening to the silence. It was very late and the murmur of London stirring in its sleep came very faintly. The ticking of his watch rang through the room, like hammers, and one of the taps in the bath dripped a little song to itself.

Everard turned on his side. "No," he breathed, "I've had my hell to-day. I shall sleep to-night." He stretched himself out and his eyes closed. He gave a deep sigh and after a minute his chest rose and fell regularly.

The moon climbed slowly up her nightly path and presently looked into the room, kindly at first, as if peeping in. Then, creeping slowly round and taking in the furniture and the books, she came to the sleeping figure on the bed, so utterly restful and at peace. Wishing not to disturb him, she was moving slowly away when suddenly she saw him start up on one elbow, wild-eyed with moving lips. His hand went out and the room was flooded with light. It is hard to escape remorse.

CHAPTER X

WHAT Ruddy chucklingly dubbed his "studio" consisted of three rooms on the top floor of a building in the thick of all the fruit stalls. The floor beneath him was the home of a French family. Ruddy always referred to it as the Warren. On Sundays after much shrill ordering about which sounded to English ears perilously like blasphemy, the family, consisting of Papa, Maman, and in order of birth, Julie, Pierre, Jean, Marie and Berthe, lined up on the squalid, banana-peel-strewn pavement and filed to nine o'clock mass at the Church of Notre Dame in Leicester Place. On week days the woman was a "blanchisseuse de fin," as advertised, the man went off in working clothes only reappearing in time for the evening meal, and the children, except Marie and Berthe who were still more or less "in arms," went off to school. But whether Sundays or week days they were always shrill and very nasal and the carrying power of their voices "was equal to that of a barrel of blasting powder," said Ruddy, "with the accent on the blast."

The ground floor was a shop kept by a grotesque German and his only slightly less grotesque wife. It was the husband's habit to lean against the doorway in his shirt-sleeves smoking Woodbine cigarettes, only moving to permit customers to enter, and watching life as it was carried on in the savoury purlieus of Brewer Street,—guaranteed at any time of day or night to appeal to the

The Hour of Conflict

Teutonic nose. He looked for all the world like a cover illustration to *Simplicissimus*,—hair coming up in clumps all over his face, chin and neck, little sprouts in his ears and nostrils, and a great ridge of it going down his collar at the back. He was short but vast with an eighteen-inch neck and a heaven knows how many inch stomach. When he turned to shoot a remark at his wife, his voice was a high fluty tenor. The wife was one of those sad-looking women with sorrowful eyes, high cheek-bones and thin tight lips. The melancholy expression was accentuated by the way in which her hair was dragged back from her forehead and stowed away in a bun behind. She took charge of the shop, although her husband insisted, because, he declared, he had the soul of an artist, on dressing the window. The artist in him had hammered nails all down both sides of the window frame and from each nail hung a highly coloured illustrated paper—*Le Rire*, *Simplicissimus*, *Frou-Frou*, *The Police Gazette*, *Die Lustige Blätter* and others of the same kidney. For the rest the window contained a higgledy-piggledy of tops, sweets, tie-clips, sugared biscuits, fly papers, packets of note paper and envelopes, hat-guards, picture postcards on many of which the legend ran "Having a good time at Brighton," and a mass of indiscriminate things.

The relationship between the different floors was a source of infinite joy to Ruddy. The Germans, being the oldest inhabitants, were inclined to breathe down their noses at the French family who were comparatively newcomers. In the first months, indeed, after their arrival the wives had very nearly come to blows, and bloodshed was only averted by the providential return of the better halves who had that very moment cemented their

The Hour of Conflict

friendship in two pints of four 'arf at the King Edward VII on the opposite side of the street. The hatchet was not really buried, however, until Jean, who was a precocious infant with a gift for picking up things tangible as well as metaphorical, went by the fat German singing "Die Wacht am Rhein."

Both families looked upon Ruddy and Angy with friendly eyes not because Angy said sweet things to the children and sometimes gave them pennies or because Ruddy had presented the German and the Frenchman with admirable charcoal drawings of themselves. The reason was that the spirit of romance which is in the heart of every foreigner whether Latin or Teutonic, however deep down, had been touched. "'Ere," they said, "were a pair of love birds. Zey were poor but zey were 'appy, and with zeir love and zeir youth, zey 'ad conquered the world, no? Yes!"

Conquered the world, eh? Ruddy looked round the three rooms. He was able to do this because the bedroom and so-called kitchen opened out of the studio. Even Napoleon would have felt at home there before his palmy days. Their keynote was scrupulous untidiness together with a delicious lack of furniture which was not so much artistic selection as financial incompetence.

The kitchen was really a large cupboard with shelves, on which were a spirit lamp, a kettle, a small frying pan, a pile of knives and forks, a plate of kippers and various small things like salt and pepper. Ruddy considered himself to be the very last word in kipper cooks. It was what he called his forte, and if you shut the kitchen door and opened all the studio and bedroom windows that would open, the mixed smell of frying fish and methylated spirits soon evaporated. Besides Angy didn't mind

The Hour of Conflict

smoke, bless her! — she occasionally lit a cigarette herself,— so Ruddy always lit a pipe when starting culinary operations.

The bedroom was, as Ruddy explained, a bedroom, that is, a place where there was a bed. Beyond the bed, indeed, there was nothing except one cane chair. It was jolly fine exercise to sit on it. It had a habit, unless you were intimate with the thing, of lurching suddenly forward and depositing you, before you had time for a gymnastic balance-regaining display, in a hard heap on the floor. Once you knew it though it was rather good fun. The lack of furniture in the bedroom and kitchen was made up by the scheme of wall decoration. This consisted of every sketch, picture, charcoal drawing and published work that Ruddy had ever done. Angy cut out the printed things with a pair of scissors and Ruddy put them up just as they came with a pin in each corner. Looking sideways along the wall one day Ruddy remained looking for about a minute. Then, "Angy! come and look here." She looked and saw an extraordinary effect produced by the armies of pins, the light glinting on their heads.

The studio contained one table, two Oxford chairs and a book-shelf. Here again the walls were covered with his work, large things in charcoal, little things in black and white on Bristol board, posters, magazine covers and an oil painting that had been refused by every dealer for miles around. Ruddy called it his one indiscretion and made fun of it, but Angy used sometimes to look up at it with her heart in her eyes. To her it was everything that she had never had and longed for, everything that was as far out of reach as the moon and the stars. Ruddy came upon her gazing at it one day.

The Hour of Conflict

"Hullo," he said. "Has my ewe lamb grown wool in the night?" He looked at it critically. All he saw was a little green path running between high bracken and oak trees. Right at the end of the path an old red brick chimney with a puff of smoke told of a little home with people living there happily. They must be happy, thought Angy, because of the sun which played hide and seek among the leaves and warmed the back of a rabbit which had hopped out of the bracken.

"To think that they didn't give me an R. A. for that!" said Ruddy with a chuckle.

"I'm glad we couldn't sell it," said Angy. "It's as good as a week in the country to me every time I look at it."

"You'll get sunstroke if you stand there much longer. Shall I get you a hat?"

"Ruddy . . . when we've got enough money for a real honeymoon let's go and stay there. Shall we?" The girl felt an arm go around her shoulder. It was a very strong arm. She was left a little breathless.

"We'll go to the sun and moon. We'll go to heaven," said Ruddy, "and never come back."

CHAPTER XI

EVERARD stood on the pavement and looked about him uncertainly. He could not see the number on any one of the houses, but he knew he was near it because lower down he had seen a hundred and ninety over a door.

A strident ear-splitting voice broke out behind him. "'Ere y' are! Fine ripe banarners! Bloods three er penny. 'Ere y' are! The latest in nuts. . . 'Ow about them things on his lilly feet, Jim?" The voice dropped to what was supposed to be a confidential murmur to the man's assistant.

"Ho! My!" said the other. "Looks 's if 'e'd escaped from the London Scottish, don't he?"

Every word of these references to his white spats reached Everard and he smiled and turned round to the two fruit sellers. It was about seven o'clock in the evening and trade is always brisk at that hour in Brewer Street. Not only is the British workingman a considerable fruit eater — it is cheap and fills the stomach — but the stage hands from the many theatres which can be reached by two minutes of back streets are extensive patrons of the line of barrows which decorate the gutter for some hundreds of yards.

"Can you tell me," said Everard, "where number two hundred is?"

The two men peered up at him curiously. They were sturdy and broad shouldered and wore coloured hand-

The Hour of Conflict

kerchiefs round their necks folded in some tricky way and stuck with a gaudy pin. A greasy and elaborate quiff of hair curled up from under the peaks of their caps.

"Two 'undred? . . . Do you know Jim?"

Jim looked down the street thoughtfully. "Two 'undred," he echoed. "Yes, yes. 'Ere, governor." He stepped up on the pavement, caught hold of Everard's arm and pulled him a little nearer the barrow.

"See that there German bloke down there wiv a cigarette leaning agin the doorpost. That's two 'undred."

"I see," said Everard. "Thanks very much." There was a moment's pause. "You might get yourself a drink."

The ready palm closed on the silver and Everard walked on. The fruit seller danced back in a double shuffle to his mate. "Wot o'. Think 'e's a blooming duke?" He slipped the shilling into his pocket, rubbed his hands together, shot cuffs that were entirely imaginary, stuck his head forward, jerked his cap over one eyebrow and imitated Everard's walk and accent. It was an excellent bit of Chevalier.

The light was fast fading and the different fruits on the barrows made great splashes of colour in the sombreness of the crowded pavements. Everard made his way among shrill-voiced foreign children, capless and dirty, who cried out in polyglot tongues as they bounced off the legs of passers-by and were growled at by tired workmen slouching heavily along, beer can in hand, and vituperated shrilly by slatternly women whose long hands clasped the folds of their shawls to their breasts. All the while the costers at the barrows outcried each other like cocks passing the word along from farmyard to

The Hour of Conflict

farmyard. Already one or two paraffin flares had been lit and the strong reek of their smoke overpowered the smell of fruit. The narrow passage in the road between the lines of barrows was filled with those who wished to get along more quickly than it was possible to do by going on the path. And the clanging bells of tricycle carriers, and the hoarse calls of the carts which forged a way at a foot pace against the stream of humanity added only one other note to the music of this street.

To Ruddy it *was* music. He often opened his window and looked down and listened to it. It was the fierce music of moil and toil and struggling poverty, of keeping body and soul together. He heard the joy of the fighter in it and the cry of the one who goes under. Sometimes it stirred him, egged him on, encouraged him. Sometimes it made him feel helpless, hopeless and truly insignificant, but that was only when some of his best work had been brought back by the postman.

But to Everard as he came up to the German in his shirtsleeves it had no appeal, struck no chord in him. It was just a badly smelling slum and he was anxious to get out of it into civilisation.

"Is this number two hundred?" he asked.

The German nodded and the cigarette moved as though of its own volition from one side of his mouth to the other.

"Do you know where Mr. Laleham lives?"

"Yah. Down ze passage go! Up ze stairs one, two, three, yes?" He held up three fat fingers.

"Thank you," said Everard.

The stairs were narrow and winding and there was no carpet. Some of the banisters were missing. The paper had peeled off the wall and hung in strips.

The Hour of Conflict

On the first landing two children peered at him from a half open door, through which could be seen a peep of white linen on a table and a woman at work, and began whispering to each other excitedly:

“Qu’il ’est rigolo.”

“Qu’ est ce qu’il porte aux pieds?”

Everard hurried up the next flight. They were the type of child who carried one’s clubs at Wimereux.

A card nailed to the door facing him on the landing caught his eye in the dimness. He struck a match and looked at it and then tapped at the door. It was Ruddy’s room at last, thank heaven.

There was a quick step inside and the door was flung wide. “Here you are at last! . . . Oh!”

The light in the room shone out into the passage. Framed in the doorway was a young girl. She drew back and her hand went to the door.

Everard removed his hat. “I beg your pardon,” he said. “Is this Mr. Laleham’s place?”

“Yes.” The voice was slightly antagonistic. “He’s not in just now.”

“Er . . . I’m sorry to have bothered you. I was going to ask him to come and dine. Would you be kind enough to tell him I came. My name’s Leyden.” Everard told himself that this girl was the explanation of the “we.”

Angy’s hand dropped from the door. “Oh, but please don’t go,” she said. “He’ll be in almost any moment. He’s only gone out to buy some kip . . . to buy some things. Won’t you come in?”

She stepped back to make room.

“Thank you,” said Everard. “If you’re sure it’s not . . .”

The Hour of Conflict

He went in and she closed the door.

The studio was lighted by two tin oil lamps behind whose chimneys were polished tin reflectors that looked like blanc mange shapes and the black and whites all round the wall lent a very cheery atmosphere.

Angy went across and lifted a mass of papers off one chair on to the floor. From the other she took up a bundle of needlework.

"Which one will you have?" she asked. Her eyes met his frankly without a trace of self-consciousness. They were very big and brown.

"I'll have the one you weren't sitting in," said Everard, "thanks very much."

She laughed — it was like a musical trickle — and sat down.

Everard looked for a peg or table or something on which to put his hat and stick. There was no peg and the table was littered with brushes, pens, pencils, paper and all the signs of work. He dropped his hat on the floor beside his chair and propped the stick in a corner.

So this was Ruddy's wife whom he had described as "one of God's own angels" and a "poor little kid." He watched her as she continued the sewing which he had evidently interrupted, and wondered whether she had made the dress she had on. It was very simple, a blue serge with little patterns stitched round the neck. Her hands were very white and long fingered. Her head was bent over her work and she had masses of dark hair. Two slim ankles appeared beneath her short skirt and one of her shoes wanted mending. The thimble gleamed as her right hand moved in and out rapidly.

From the street beneath came the cries of the fruit vendors and a faint smell of paraffin.

The Hour of Conflict

Angy looked up at him. "Wasn't it you Ruddy met the other night in Gambrinus?"

Everard nodded. "I owe you an apology for that."

Her eyes opened wide. "An apology! Why?"

"Well, I'm afraid I kept him from getting back here at the time he promised. I'm awfully sorry. It was entirely my fault."

"Oh, no," said Angy. "I never expect Ruddy until he comes in. You see he gets so interested in things and forgets all about time. At first I used to worry, but now I'm used to it. Was he like that at Oxford?"

"He would have been if we had allowed it, but whenever we wanted him we fetched him. The other night was the first time I'd seen him since he was . . . since he left Oxford and that's over a year."

Ruddy had not only told Angy that he had been sent down, but had given her glowing accounts of his "funeral," punctuated with roars of laughter, and there was an elaborate pencil drawing hanging in a corner of the arrival of the proctors on the scene and the sudden flight of many weirdly dressed undergraduates from the file of hansom cabs which followed the "hearse" containing Ruddy and his few goods and chattels. All the same the girl noticed that Everard had checked himself quickly from giving his friend away. It was very nice of him, she thought. And then she turned her head quickly towards the door. There was the sound of gigantic feet on the stairs, feet coming up thump, thump, thump, two at a time.

"Here he comes!" she said.

The work dropped into her chair and she opened the door.

"Here we are," said Ruddy. "Half a dozen beauties

The Hour of Conflict

all stiff and slimy." He held out something wrapped in newspaper and then caught sight of Everard. "Hul-lo! How *are* you? You're just in time to have dinner with us. Look here." He unrolled the newspaper and held out six kippers for Everard's inspection. "Don't they look great? Why, you simply can't get 'em at the Carlton!" He flung a hand through his hair.

Angy smiled and took the fish from him. She had refrained from telling Everard at the door that Ruddy had been buying kippers not because she felt self-conscious about it, but from loyalty to Ruddy. This Mr. Leyden might not have understood. Oxford men were not in the habit of buying fish in newspapers and she didn't want anybody to sneer at Ruddy. But she saw that he was smiling too. It was another point in his favour.

"Thanks awfully," said Everard, "but won't you and Mrs. Laleham come out and dine with me?"

Ruddy turned quickly to the girl. There was a curious expression on her face which hurt him and which he knew Everard could not understand. He put a hand on each of her shoulders and when he spoke the laughter had all gone out of his voice.

"I knew it would happen sooner or later," he said, "and we decided to be quite truthful about it, didn't we?"

The girl made no move for a moment. Then she nodded and her eyes watched Everard's face while Ruddy told. He held her very tight.

"Angy is not Mrs. Laleham," he said. "That is, not yet. She will be one day when the man to whom she is married has squared his account with the Almighty. I don't envy him that. He did his best to kill Angy

The Hour of Conflict

until the police fortunately caught him at a big burglary in which a watchman was killed. He's doing fifteen years now and . . . and this little girl and I are looking after each other as best we can in richness and poverty till death do us part. Amen."

The room was very still for a moment.

Then Everard moved towards them. "I hope you will be very happy," he said. "Will you allow me to be Ruddy's best man on the great day?"

And then Ruddy gave an enormous laugh and the little girl held out her hand to Everard and all was well with the world.

Not quite all. Everard saw himself standing on the seashore in the dusk and Toinette was saying, "Let me come with you. I can cook and sew and wash clothes."

"Oh, my God," he thought, "if only I'd had the pluck! Here are these two working and happy. Ruddy has defied *his* father. Why didn't I have the pluck to do the same and bring Toinette? If only I had!"

All unconsciously Ruddy had shown him two things — what he might have done, and what he must do now. What he had to do now was to work. In that and that alone seemed to lie his salvation.

CHAPTER XII

THERE was a great discussion while Angy was putting on a hat as to where they should go. Everard felt that it was an occasion and wanted to do the thing in some style. Ruddy, however, murmured quietly, "Not in these!" and the committee of three eventually decided upon Frascati's.

To Frascati's they went as fast as a taxi could take them. They were a happy little party. The spirit of nonsense had suddenly caught them and they did foolish things and laughed absurdly. Everard made ridiculous comments about the band and the waiters and the Turk who boiled coffee in quaint little copper pots and then Ruddy produced a pencil and did lightning sketches of the men and women — curious people all of them — at the other tables and Everard picked them up, constituted himself a showman and in a rich Anglo-French accent with much gesticulation which kept the others with tears streaming down their cheeks, explained the habits, occupation, age, income and habitat of each one.

And then when they had chaffed the Turk and sampled his peculiar syrupy coffee Everard suggested a music-hall just to round off the evening and bring it to a thoroughly successful conclusion.

"I can't come anyhow," said Ruddy. "I've got to do a thing for *London Opinion* which I promised to let them have the first thing to-morrow morning. But there's no reason why you and Angy shouldn't go. What do you say?"

The Hour of Conflict

"Will you let me take care of you?" said Everard.

The girl smiled. "Thank you," she said. "I should like to come very much, but the thought of Ruddy slaving all by himself would spoil my evening."

"Don't worry about me, kiddy, I shall be all right."

"No," said Everard. "You're perfectly right. It wouldn't be any fun. But look here, let's make an arrangement now for an evening this week when we can all go."

"Grand notion," said Ruddy.

Everard turned to the girl. "What night would suit you best?"

Angy left it to Ruddy and he suggested Friday.

And so it was arranged that they should meet and dine somewhere and then go to the Empire. They left the table.

Angy noticed that Everard glanced at the clock. It was just after nine. She wondered why his high spirits seemed to have evaporated all at once. They made their way out of the restaurant and the two men collected their hats and stick. Ruddy couldn't be bothered with a stick.

"Well, old man," said Ruddy, "Angy and I have had the evening of our lives, thanks. We're going to organise a little feed for you one night — probably on the proceeds of to-night's work!"

"You *will* come?" The girl's very tone was an invitation.

Everard looked from one to the other quickly. "Rather!" he said. There was a moment's pause, then he spoke hurriedly. "I say, would it prevent your working if I came back with you now? That is of course if you . . ."

The Hour of Conflict

"Prevent me! I should say not. An audience inspires me. Doesn't it, Angy?"

"We can all have some more coffee if you'll come," said the girl. "Real coffee this time." She made a bitter face at the memory of the thick Turkish stuff.

"Thanks awfully," said Everard. "I should love it. . . . Hi! Taxi!"

His high spirits had returned and he leaped across the pavement and had the door of the taxi open before it had drawn up.

While they spun through the streets, the two men talking hard, the girl was quietly putting two and two together. There was something about this boy that she did not understand, something which was not quite normal. She thought back to the moment when he had been told about herself and Ruddy and remembered the curious expression of longing which had come into his eyes, and the effort he had made to brighten up on the drive to Frascati's. His changes of mood, too, were so pronounced that she couldn't help noticing,—his incessant fun during the meal, his depression at their not being able to go to a music hall with him, the way in which he had, as it were, plucked up his courage to invite himself back and his obvious relief when they had agreed. All this was rather curious and unusual, and she found herself studying his face as street lamp after street lamp flashed into the window and picked out his face for a second. She saw that his hands were clutched tightly together,—he was answering Ruddy's heated arguments by "yes" and "no" and "really"—and that every time a lamp shone in like a miniature searchlight, he shifted in his seat as if he wanted to avoid it.

Angy had not been through suffering for nothing. It

The Hour of Conflict

had tuned her to a peculiar sensitiveness, a sympathy which made her feel that everything was not going as it should with Ruddy even when he was laughing and joking in his merriest manner, which made her give half-pennies to the French children on the landing below and help their mother whenever possible in any little way that offered itself. So now sitting opposite Everard she felt that his gaiety throughout the evening was the outcome of immense effort, was in fact the wall behind which he was hiding. And the thing that he was hiding from kept peering over the wall.

They tumbled up the stairs by the light of a pin prick of gas.

"Don't make too much noise," breathed Angy, turning round and putting up a finger. "You'll wake all the babies."

"Hang the babies!" said Ruddy. "Let's try and get up these so-called stairs without waking ourselves up." But all the same he said it quietly and in another second had kicked his shoes off. Everard went up on tip toe.

Inside the door Ruddy pitched his hat across the room and then suddenly caught Angy by the shoulder. "Pst! . . . Can you hear anything?" He shot a wink at Everard.

Angy remained motionless listening, her eyes fixed on the open door. Then she shook her head.

Everard was looking out of the window.

Ruddy took her quickly in his arms and whispered, "I love you."

"Darling!" She held up her face like a little girl and then slipped into the next room to take off her hat.

The big man in his stockinged feet made a long arm,

The Hour of Conflict

caught up the two tin lamps and lit them and put one each side of his work table.

"There's baccy and a comfortable chair and in about two shakes there'll be some coffee. Angy's hot stuff on coffee. I can't make out how the deuce she does it. Whenever I cook it, it comes out rotten. I suppose some people are born with the culinary instinct." He looked up. Everard was leaning on the window-sill looking out over the opposite roofs.

There was a whimsical expression on Ruddy's face as he put a great hand on the boy's shoulder. "Don't you think so?" he said.

"Er . . . thanks. Yes, I will . . ." Everard moved quickly and turned into the room. "Hullo, I see you're all ready for work. Splendid! I've never seen a real artist on the war path. Get down to it Ruddy and let's see how it's done."

The artist did as he was bid.

When Angy brought in three steaming cups of coffee five minutes later, she saw both men sitting at the table, Everard silently watching the swift pen creating the pictures which meant bread and butter for them both.

Midnight struck before Ruddy heaved a sigh and laid down his pen. "There we are," he said. "That's a guinea anyhow."

"It's simply topping," said Everard. "Jove, I wish I could draw."

"Ever tried?" said Ruddy.

The answer was a sarcastic laugh. "Might as well ask you to grow apples as expect me to use a pencil."

"I *could* grow apples with a bit of instruction," said Ruddy. Everard knocked out his pipe and got up.

The girl was folding away her sewing, having thor-

The Hour of Conflict

oughly enjoyed her evening, for they had all three been talking hard while the illustration was being done.

Hat and stick in hand, Everard held out his hand to the girl.

"Thank you for this evening," he said. "Good night. . . . So long, Ruddy, old man," and he was out and going as quietly as possible down the rickety stairs.

The two lovers stood arm in arm at the open door till the sounds had finished. Then the girl shut the door.

"Is he in trouble?" she asked.

The red eyebrows went up. "Trouble? I dunno. . . . What makes you ask?"

"I thought he was worrying," said Angy. "I had a sort of feeling that there was something the matter. Something rather big."

Ruddy looked at her almost with awe. "It's uncanny the way you feel these things," he said. "I thought he was very cheery."

"So he was. But there was something there behind it. Perhaps he'll tell us one of these days and we shall be able to help." She heaved a sigh and turned out one of the lamps. Ruddy turned out the other. Outside all was quiet. The market had long since closed and the hucksters had left the street in peace for another short night. The faint glimmer of a street lamp made it just light enough to see in the room.

"I *have* enjoyed myself to-night." The girl's voice followed a yawn.

Ruddy slid an arm around her shoulder. "Funny thing Everard should have talked about my growing apples. I should have been doing so in Canada if I hadn't found you." The two figures were very close together in the darkness.

The Hour of Conflict

"Are you glad you found me?" The question was only a whisper.

"Glad!" He took a deep breath. "You know those funny little old apples that dry up and wrinkle when left on a shelf? I should become one of those if you . . . if anything . . ."

Angy laid a soft hand over his mouth.

CHAPTER XIII

THE only work that Everard knew anything about was that which lay to his hand—the Bar examination. He had never felt any sort of special inclination towards the Bar, but at Oxford it had been necessary to go in for some particular school and he had chosen law because it seemed to him to be the only school which might be of some use afterwards. He had never given the matter much attention. Two minutes' thought had decided it. Now that he was once more prepared to turn his brain to something, to concentrate for all he was worth,—and he made up his mind that there should be no playing at it,—there were the books all ready on the shelf.

He cleared a space on the table, provided himself with ink and paper and brought them down. He was going to justify himself in Toinette's eyes. He was going to make good his word, do something, achieve things. He was going to escape from the relentless remorse which stalked perpetually at his heels. His only salvation lay in work.

It was, indeed, a very different Everard who sat down to the table from the one who had looked out of the window of his room in the little café at Wimereux the first night of his arrival there. He was bored and cynical then because a host of little things had piled themselves one on top of the other and sent a wave of bitter introspection over him. Now they had all become per-

The Hour of Conflict

sonal and had grown from little things to a vast overwhelming size and were still piling up. He looked physically different,— older, thinner, shadows under his eyes, which had an entirely new expression,— the tired look of a man who has been overdoing it every night for a week. He opened the law books and the various note books that he had not touched for so long, propped his elbows on the table and his head on his hands and began reading.

Those dusty law books however seemed to have absorbed something of the atmosphere of the Café Tardot where they had remained unopened during the boy's stay. It was as if they too had met and loved Toinette, for as Everard turned the pages the words faded and her face looked up at him, the curling eyelashes, the big eyes whose tears he had kissed away, the dark abundant hair that the sea wind had blown across his face and the beautiful lips that had called him "Mon Evérard!"

"Mon Evérard!" They called him now. It was as if a tiny voice had spoken in his ear.

He rose quickly and began to walk up and down the room. How could he work if that happened? It wasn't fair. Let him at least make a start without . . . *that* coming to interfere. After all he was trying to do the straight thing. He had taken himself in hand sufficiently well to begin to try and keep his word. For God's sake don't let him have to go through all that first.

It was with shaky hands that he flung up the window and let in the sun and heard the impertinent twitterings of sparrows, and the purring note of motor cars speeding down the long street. All these were normal everyday things. Why could not he work normally?

Perhaps if he brought the table into the sun? . . . He

The Hour of Conflict

moved away the long chair and dragged the table up against the wall beneath the window. The sun flooded the books and papers and when he brought up a stiff-backed chair and sat down once more, the sun shone fiercely in his face. Yes. That was better. It would be all right now. He knocked out a cold pipe and filled it from a large stone jar, a heavy thing with a great leaden weight pressing down the tobacco. The match sputtered and thin clouds of blue-grey smoke floated out until the draught at the window sill caught them and tossed them up and backwards. The sun made a little kind of rainbow effect which the boy watched for a moment.

Then once more he turned to the books, a frown of determination on his face.

It was no good.

The dancing specks in the sunbeam became golden hair and Marthe said crossly, "Her name is Toinette Guerchard and one day she will be like that . . ." and she made a gesture with her hands to signify enormous fatness.

One day! The boy held up his face to the sun. One day! That was finished. There could be no "one day" now. But why? Why? What did it all mean? Why did the sun shine for every one else in the world except him? Why had he been picked out to be always in the darkness? What had he done? Always it had been like that, always, and for no reason. As a small boy he had looked on at others who laughed and were jolly, while he was alone, outcast, a pariah. At school he had had to fight his way through, still in the shadow. He had done nothing to deserve that. Why had he gone to France? Why had he met Toinette? Why was he

The Hour of Conflict

so made that he had climbed into her room? Why was she so different from other girls, from Angy for instance? Why had she been so crushed? Why didn't she understand things as the rest? It was not fair.

It was as if he had been singled out for punishment for a crime that he had not committed and then driven finally by that punishment into committing a crime. And now the punishment was redoubled.

He shot out a bitter laugh, kicked away his chair and began pacing up and down, his hands deep in his pockets. He was tired of it all. He wished to God he had never been born. There was only one hideous thing against him in all his twenty-four years and for that he would never cease to be sorry; but why should he be hunted night and day without ceasing? Why should his days be tainted with the remembrance of this thing; his nights made times of dread and terror? He was only twenty-four and if there was a God why didn't He take his youth into consideration? The Abbé Guerchard had talked a lot about God and His goodness and mercy. Why didn't He show some of it now? Why did He stamp on a man when he was down? Even human judges were lenient towards first offenders.

He stopped in his pacing and very quietly laid his pipe upon the table. There was a curious look in his eyes as he took up his hat and put it on and reached out for his stick and gloves. "Yes," he said, "that's the answer. That's what it means."

He pulled out the money in his pockets. One, two, three sovereigns and some change. "More than enough," he said and went out, closed the bedroom door behind him quietly and made his way downstairs and out into the street.

The Hour of Conflict

When a cab brought him into the Haymarket he leaned forward watching the shops, and then suddenly tapped at the glass behind the chauffeur. He stopped with a jerk.

Everard got out, paid and walked quietly through the shop door.

At the far end a very excellently dressed man was choosing sporting rifles. Everard leaned on his stick and noticed that he had a silver ring on his left little finger, shaped oddly, like the mouth of a codfish.

"Good morning, sir."

He turned and found a shop assistant ready to attend to him, a Jew-boy of the most offensive description, he thought. "Show me some revolvers, will you?" he said.

"Any particular make, sir? Smith-Wesson, Brown-
ing?"

The man's nails were long and pointed. Everard disliked him more and more. "No," he said. "I've no particular choice, thanks. I want to pay about three sovereigns."

The man produced a tray containing a dozen revolvers, some shiny with stubby little handles, some blue black with square butts. He picked up a shiny one, and held it out by the barrel to Everard.

"He would pick out the kind I don't like!" thought Everard. "No," he said. "What about this?" He took up a short but business-like looking thing. "How do you work it, load and so on?"

"You open the chamber like this, sir," said the man showing him.

"I see," said Everard. "Very simple and quick. How much?"

"Two pound ten."

The Hour of Conflict

Everard took it and held it silently for a moment, clicking the trigger. Then he laid it on the counter. "Thanks," he said. "I'll have that one. Give me a box of cartridges, too."

The Jew took up the tray and replaced it under the glass of the counter. "Fifty or a hundred, sir?"

"Oh, a hundred,"

The man busied himself with paper and string. "Shall I send it, sir?"

Everard laid three sovereigns on the glass. "No, thanks, I'll take it."

He tucked the parcel under one arm, gathered up his change and walked quietly out of the shop.

CHAPTER XIV

EVERARD entered his bedroom and shut the door quietly and locked it. He stood there leaning against it for a moment and then unlocked it, hung his straw hat on its usual peg and placed his stick in the corner.

He took the parcel from under his left arm, looked at it for a moment, fingered the knot and then laid it down unopened on the table.

It was very stuffy. He flung up the window. The afternoon sun had disappeared, leaving a trail of blood red in the sky. The boy stayed for a minute looking out. Then he turned and slowly came back to the table and stretched out a hand to the parcel. The knot was very tight and refused to be undone. Everard took his penknife and cut the string. The brown paper crinkled as he unfolded it and brought out a cardboard box. He opened the flaps.

There were the cartridges and there was the revolver, blue black with little numbers on it. He picked it up.

It was very cold, like some dead thing.

Some dead thing! He laid it down quickly and moved away from the table with a little shiver. How had *she* felt before giving herself up to the sea? . . .

Would it make a tremendous noise? Robinson would dash up of course to see what was the matter. But they wouldn't have to break down the door.

What was the best way,— to hold it to one's temple or

The Hour of Conflict

put the barrel in one's mouth? Perhaps it would not be quite instantaneous. . . . Wouldn't it be better to press it over his heart,—unbutton his waistcoat, there, just where his ribs curved away?

The light was going fast. It was getting late. . . . It didn't matter. There was nothing to see. The feel was everything.

The boy moved round the room touching things affectionately, but all the time his thoughts ran away back to the thing on the table. How did one . . . go out? Were there any necessary preliminaries,—letters or anything? Toinette hadn't written. There was no one who would care a damn. . . . Some people were supposed to say their prayers. Did she say them? . . . God and he were not on speaking terms. They didn't understand each other. But he might say a little prayer to Toinette. *She* would hear him. Yes, he would just tell her he was on his way.

He went to the window. She wouldn't have knelt . . . on the sand. He stood very still, his hands gripping the ledge, his eyes looking over the roofs at the dark jagged clouds which were massed low down in the sky.

"Mignonne, I'm sorry you went first." The words came very quietly. It was as though she were just outside the window. "If I hadn't loved you, you would have been very happy. I'm awfully sorry. But you've taken my heart with you. There's nothing left. So I'm coming to find you. . . . Look out for me, Toinette darling. I shall be there in a second."

The street lamps were being lit one by one and the chauffeurs on the stand just down the road were seeing to their headlights. Everard saw nothing of this. He turned from the window into the almost dark room and

The Hour of Conflict

broke open the box of cartridges. Two or three dropped noiselessly onto the carpet.

He picked up the revolver and half pulled back the trigger. It clicked and the chamber turned. He slipped in a cartridge. How neat the thing was. The chambers turned once more under his hand and he put in another cartridge and another until all six were loaded.

Mouth, temple, or heart, which?

He felt very cold and the palms of his hands were damp. That wouldn't matter in a moment.

With his left hand he unbuttoned his waistcoat, still standing near the table. It was all so easy, really. There was nothing to worry about. Just a crook of the finger and you were all right. His wrist bent and he felt the foresight catch in his shirt. He released it and moved it upwards, until he felt it below his chest,—just where the ribs curved away.

Why was his heart thumping like that? It was absurd. He was trembling, too, and holding his breath. He put out his left hand and clasped the iron bed rail.

His finger edged round the trigger.

"Look out for me." He closed his eyes and pulled. . . .

He seemed to hear the splash of his body falling into the sea. It was very cold, but what did it matter?

He was dead, walking along the bottom of the sea. It was very lonely and there were strange noises in his ears. Where was Toinette? She had gone in here. In a moment he would find her. She was waiting for him. He had told her to and she loved him. Therefore she would be there. And she would call his name after he had walked a little farther, and then he would see her coming towards him, with outstretched hands and love

The Hour of Conflict

burning in her eyes. Would that bit of seaweed still be dangling from her shoe? They would laugh about that now because soon *his* feet would be caught in seaweed. . . . But where was she? Why didn't she come? He couldn't see her anywhere in the darkness. He called her name loudly. There was no answer. . . . Had she gone away? Had she forgotten? That was absurd. How *could* she forget? They loved each other for ever and ever. Toinette! come quickly! I am here! . . . Why didn't she answer? She must be here. She had gone into the cold waves first. Why didn't she come now that he had followed her? He stood still and listened.

What *were* those noises? Did dead people hear? Why didn't Toinette come? Something must be keeping her. There were more noises, odd things like. . . . What were they like? They were like the motor cars he used to hear under his windows, when he was alive. Why should he hear them now? It was absurd. He was dead. He didn't want to hear them. He refused to hear them. He wanted to hear Toinette's voice, to feel her cheek against his, to nestle in her arms and be forgiven. "Toinette! Don't let me be all alone like this. I'm afraid. Where are you? I . . ."

The hand which held the revolver dropped away from his heart. His eyes opened and looked about blankly. What did it mean? There were walls, a window, a table in front of it. Those noises? and lights?

He looked at his left hand. It was still clasping the bed rail. He was standing, holding a revolver.

The weapon was at halfcock and had not gone off.

He stood there and slowly the realisation that he was not dead came upon him.

The Hour of Conflict

With a soft thud the pistol dropped upon the carpet. He covered his face with his hands and swayed unsteadily.

“Let me off!” he cried. “Oh, God, let me off. I can’t do it again. I . . .”

He pitched forward on his face and lay very still.

CHAPTER XV

NUMBER two hundred Brewer Street was an early rising household,—not that there were any worms to catch there, but simply because it was one of the Necessitarian Virtues. France woke first, somewhere in the chilly fives. Germany listened to the awakening and dozed on for another three quarters of an hour. England came in a bad but quite contented third—except in winter—and returned to blinking consciousness at seven o'clock.

England's ménage resembled a jig-saw puzzle,—while one person fits in one piece somebody else is fitting in another. There was only one bath, a hip bath, and only the bedroom to have it in. So while Angy gave an imitation of an undergraduate in the "hipper"—she had first go because she had to get to her typewriting office at nine,—Ruddy, his feet in loose slippers that went flip flap, flip flap, as he ambled about in a dressing gown with his hair like a haystack after four children have been sliding up and down it, got the coffee ready, started the kippers slowly cooking, dipped into the paper and read what letters there might be.

Then, when Angy emerged looking as bright as a new pin, she took command of the kitchen while Ruddy filled the bedroom with whistlings and splashings. There were mornings when she would hear mutterings after the musical tub, then a smothered expression and a great wrench of the bed.

The Hour of Conflict

“What is it?”

With his wet hair combed and brushed Ruddy would come out speechless with a mutinous collar stud between his finger and thumb, and his collar, fixed at the back, sticking out at right angles. For perhaps thirty seconds the girl would give it her close and undivided attention and then mere man would confess himself beaten and he would resume his whistling and she her cooking, and all would be well. At eight thirty they left the house together to walk to her office which was far down Oxford Street. Ruddy would leave her within a hundred yards of the place, watch her safely in and then rush back to Brewer Street to begin work.

On the morning of the day when Everard visited the gunsmith's in the Haymarket, exciting things happened in the studio. Ruddy flip flapped out of the bedroom as usual about five minutes past seven, put his head out of the front window, looked up and down the street, grunted sleepily, and went across to the door to collect the paper. There were two letters on top of it. He looked at them, turned them over and read the names of two papers on the backs and put them on the table while he filled the spirit cooker and started things going. Angy was singing to herself while she dressed.

“You're very chirpy this morning,” said Ruddy.

The girl's voice came through. “I feel as if I were up in an aeroplane, or as if I'd discovered the South Pole or done something wonderful.” There was a little excited laugh.

Ruddy took up his letters and ripped them open, and while he quickly read first one and then the other, a grin divided his face from ear to ear.

“What's the matter with you?” called Angy. “Got

The Hour of Conflict

any letters?" There was no definite reply, but she heard a series of curious thumps, followed by the fall of a chair, and then Ruddy's voice as he burst into song. "Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it! Everybody's . . ."

Angy popped her head round the door. "Doing what?"

Ruddy came up to her in a series of side steps, waving things in his hand, extemporising as he came:

*"Rum tum, tum, tum,
Tum tum tiddle
Was the cheque he
Got for his sketch little
Tiddy diddy di da
What ho she bumps . . ."*

He waved a cheque before her eyes and then stopped singing and said in the tones of an excited boy, "Listen to this. *The Bystander*. 'Dear Sir: I shall be glad if you will come and see me any time on Wednesday morning with reference to the black and white drawing you sent me on Friday of last week. Yours faithfully, something — something Sprocket, Editor.' What price that, young woman, eh? See me go forth in all the glory of my high hat and treat with this person with Buckingham Palace pomp! Ha, ha!"

Angy's face lit up. "Oh, my dear! . . . What can it mean?"

"I haven't the vaguest conception, but it's something good. I feel it in my bones. By Jove, if only I've got my foot in at last! . . . Hurry up, darling!"

Angy hurried. It was usually a point of contest between them to see who should spill the least water from the hip bath. This morning, however, Ruddy forgot

The Hour of Conflict

all about it. Water went everywhere. Great splashes of it, and he was nothing like dry when he struggled into a pristine shirt and a pair of black trousers which he took from beneath the mattress, thus beautifully pressed and ironed. This was a field-day, and the trousers were field-day trousers used only for the interviewing of editors, and the coat must be carefully brushed and smoothed out. Then there was a wing collar and a bow tie, a black bow tie that Angy would conjure into a butterfly. He was a rotter at bow ties. And there was the high hat that lived in a box under the bed out of harm's way. That needed at least five minutes' careful soothing with a silk handkerchief. *The Bystander!* Gad if only . . .

"Ruddy! Oh, Ruddy, come here quickly!"

Angy's startled voice broke in on him with a shock in the preparation of his clothes and he was out of the bedroom in two leaps.

She was standing, very white, in front of the *Daily Mail*, which was spread out on the table.

She caught his hand and pointed silently. He could feel that she was trembling. She placed a shaking finger on a short paragraph at the bottom of a column.

"PRISONER SHOT AT DARTMOOR.

"Yesterday afternoon while at work in the quarries, one of the convicts suddenly attacked Warden John Petrie with his shovel, struck him from behind and started to run. The noise attracted the attention of Warden Alfred Smith who immediately opened fire and with his second shot struck the escaping convict through the left lung. Petrie sustained a fractured skull. The convict, Frederick Mackinerny, who was on a fifteen years' sentence for the great Queen Victoria Street burglary of a year ago, died some hours later."

The Hour of Conflict

Ruddy read the little casual paragraph out loud, the girl's hand tight in his. It was a big moment for them both and they forgot all about the kippers, which were sizzling up to a stick. They just stood and looked at each other silently, the man in trousers and a shirt with his braces hanging down and one slipper halfway across the room, the girl with very big eyes looking into his.

"Don't start thinking back, kiddy. He's dead and we can both thank God for it." He pulled her across the room and stood her under the oil painting. "I don't know where the rabbit lives, but we'll go out and find him, just you and I. Mr. and Mrs. Laleham, eh? And then we might trot along and look up the Guvnor and mother. How does it strike you?"

It struck her very hard, for when she lifted her head off Ruddy's chest she said, "Oh, look, I've made your shirt all wet. . . . Isn't it funny how everything always happens on the same day?"

CHAPTER XVI

ABOUT seven o'clock that night a mad taxi, from which came the sound of singing, broken by shouts of laughter, turned into Eaton Square, rushed round two sides and drew up in front of the Leydens' house.

The chauffeur leaned a hand round the side of the machine and opened the door.

A leg came out, then another, and finally a long body, backwards, crowned with an opera hat. It was Ruddy in the evening clothes he had worn at Oxford. He had grown a lot since those days, but as his purse had not swelled correspondingly, he showed several inches of grey socks and several inches of white cuff. Add to that red hair and a crush hat which had never really fitted and you get a figure of fun. It might have been rather a tragic figure were it not that nothing could quench the man's optimism.

To the tune of "Everybody's Doing It" he went up the steps and rang the bell and a moment later was facing Robinson, whose countenance remained solemn in spite of the quick up-and-down look with which he took the caller in from head to foot.

"Mr. Everard Leyden?"

"Yes, sir; he lives here." There was a touch of doubt in the man's voice.

Ruddy disregarded it and walked in. "Just take me up, will you?"

Robinson closed the door reluctantly. "If you will

The Hour of Conflict

be so good as to wait here, sir, I will go and see if he is in."

But the occasion was too great a one to expect such a man as Ruddy to stand still and twiddle his thumbs while a dignified man-servant went off to make inquiries.

As soon as Robinson moved to the stairs he followed him up and along the passage until he tapped at the door. Then he brushed him aside. "Thanks," he said. "That'll be all to-night."

He thumped on the door and with the familiarity acquired at Oxford turned the handle and went in.

The room was very dark and for a moment Ruddy stood blinking uncertainly. Then he saw Everard sitting in an armchair near the window, his arms on the table and his head upon his arms. He went across quickly, his mind echoing with Angy's remarks about his friend being worried about something.

The boy started as Ruddy's hand gripped his shoulder. He raised his head.

"My God!" Ruddy exclaimed under his breath. Even in that dim light Everard looked as if he had suddenly grown years older. "What's the trouble, old man? Can I help? . . . Look here," he went on with a rush, "pull yourself together and chuck the damned thing on one side, whatever it is. You're wanted to-night. You've got to come along and be merry and bright and drink champagne and be an optimist and let the dead past bury its dead. You've got to come and help Angy and me celebrate. It's a night of nights and you're essential to our well-being. We want you and we're jolly well going to have you. . . . Come on. We're not taking no for an answer. Angy is waiting in a taxi outside

The Hour of Conflict

and she'll go on waiting until you're ready. I know you've never kept a lady waiting in your life and you're not going to begin now. Now look here, I'll valet you so as to save time. First of all, let's have some light on the scene and then I'll see if I can't have you downstairs inside of ten minutes."

He went across and found the switch, asking himself silently what was the matter, what had hit Everard so hard? As he turned round from flicking on the light he caught sight of the pistol lying on the carpet and the spilt cartridges. And again he said, "My God!" and shivered. . . .

The whole point was to take no notice of Everard, he told himself, and so he kept on talking. "What's in here? Bathroom, by Jove! You're a luxurious devil to have a bathroom out of your bedder. Topping place, too." He switched the light up in there and then turned on the taps. "You should see how Angy and I work our baths in the morning! Then you'd appreciate this a bit more than you probably do. Here you are, sir; bath ready, sir. Where do you keep your evening clothes? In this elaborately simple wardrobe, I suppose. . . . Yes. Pretty colossal cheek my barging in like this, don't you think? It had to be done, though, because we want you, Angy and I. You're going to help us have the biggest binge on record. It's a day of days and I'll tell you all about it when you've changed. But of course you needn't change if you like. I've only raked up a suit of misfits. These are the things we did Alpine climbing in at Oxford. Jove, great times, what? . . ."

All the time he talked and walked about and started the bath and opened wardrobes he had one eye on his

The Hour of Conflict

friend, one searching, questioning, wondering eye. He saw that at first he might have been talking to a dead body, so obvious was it that the boy did not hear him. And all the time at the back of his mind he knew that Angy was getting more and more worried down there in the motor. But if this boy had been thinking of suicide it was up to him to stay there until he brought him back to a reasonable frame of mind, even if he kept her waiting all night. She would agree to that point of view, he knew. Gradually, however, as he babbled on, he saw Everard begin to take himself in hand.

At last he got up and began to finger the books on the table. "Hullo," he said. "What are you . . . I mean . . ."

Ruddy went across and pulled out a box of cigarettes. "Have one of these. They're so rotten I should like you to try them."

Everard shook his head. "No, thanks."

"You're a very sociable person, aren't you?" said Ruddy. "Here I come round *with* Angy, *in* a taxi, *and* my best bib and tucker and you refuse my cigarettes, you talk in monosyllables and you stand about looking like a good imitation of the ghost of Hamlet's father. Did you hear a word I said to you just now?"

Everard shook his head.

"Then smoke one of those and listen while I say it all over again. It is well worth hearing. Here!" He handed a cigarette to Everard and held a match while he lit it. "Now listen. This is one of those times in one's life when it is necessary to leap about, to break things, to make a fool of oneself. It is a day when one forgets the past and all the damned unkind things it has done to you. Are you listening? . . . This is

The Hour of Conflict

what has happened. This morning we saw in the *Mail*,— it couldn't have been any other paper — that the man who married Angy had relieved the world of his tedious presence. Therefore there's going to be a wedding in Brewer Street. Secondly, I went round this morning in my most beautiful garments to the offices of *The By-stander* at the editor's personal request and found that he is the most brainy man in London. That is to say, he has recognised the cunning in my pencil and I'm a member of his staff at a salary of eight quid a week. . . . Eight quid a week, my boy! Do you know what that means? It means a change of diet from the friendly but monotonous kipper. It means new frocks for my wife, *my wife!* — and it means also that to-night we are going to hold a vast and magnificent celebration in which champagne and oysters are mere trifling items. It means, moreover, that you have got to celebrate with us. In fact, without you we shall not celebrate at all, and you will therefore ruin what should be ~~the~~ the greatest day in our lives. Do you understand that Angy is waiting and *has* been waiting downstairs in a taxi for the last fifteen minutes, and that *you* have been the cause of her waiting? Do you understand that I do not leave this room without you and that furthermore you must be in your glad rags and a good temper . . ." He broke off for a moment and watched Everard crushing his unsmoked cigarette. When he spoke again it was quite simply and with great feeling.

"Look here, old son, try and keep your end up. Don't use that thing. We've all made hideous mistakes, but there's always a way out if you only keep on trying. I don't want to seem a poisonous ass, but . . . God's a jolly good sportsman and . . . He'll make it all right.

The Hour of Conflict

Why, dash it, look what He's done for Angy and me! . . . Give it another chance. Come with us and help me make my little girl have the happiest night of her life. Making other people happy is the surest way to forget one's own troubles."

Everard looked at him with a sneer. "You're talking platitudinous damn nonsense," he said. "How the devil do you know anything about it? You talk about making people happy and keeping on trying in an easy copybook way, but have you gone down to hell night after night, a hell which is partly your own cursed making? Have you been hunted by remorse until you've turned round in the streets to see if you've escaped at last? Have you been hit when you're down by your sporting God . . .?"

He broke off and kicked viciously at the revolver, and then suddenly his whole manner changed. All the cynicism and bitterness and rage left his voice. He came over to Ruddy and caught hold of his arm and when he spoke it was like a child pleading. "Don't leave me here alone. Take me with you. Take me anywhere—I don't care where it is so long as I don't stay here. I've had about as much as I can stand, Ruddy. For God's sake don't go."

Ruddy was amazed and appalled and deeply moved. He had never in his life seen any man so emotional, so hysterical, so completely out of control, so near the verge of breaking entirely down. And Everard of all men! Why, he had thought that he was just putting in a pretence at work and having a good time. Hadn't this man a few nights ago been the life and soul of their little party at Frascati's? Hadn't he cracked jokes and done funny things in the most wholehearted and delight-

The Hour of Conflict

ful manner? Could it be the same man who was now clinging to his arm begging him not to go? If he didn't look out, Everard *would* break down.

"That's all right," he said in a most casual tone of voice. "That's what I'm here for. I've come to fetch you and we're all going out to have a tremendous spree. Now come on, and have a clean up and make yourself look like a little gentleman."

He took him across to the bathroom and stood about talking hard while Everard obeyed instructions and washed himself. But while he was drying Ruddy slipped into the sitting room and picked up the revolver and emptied the chamber and made a collection of every cartridge he could see and hid them all in a corner behind some old magazines. Then he laid out dress clothes, and put links in a white shirt and took the trees out of shoes and blew clouds of cigarette smoke and dropped ash everywhere and told Everard all about the day that had brought forth such momentous events for himself and Angy and how they were going for a honeymoon after Everard had been best man at the wedding; until at last after what seemed an eternity he got his friend downstairs and into the taxi where Angy told them of all the things she had been wondering while they kept her waiting. And while Everard was pulling himself together and apologising, Ruddy leaned back in the cab with a great sigh of relief.

It was going to be very difficult to give Angy the happiest night of her life.

CHAPTER XVII

THE cab drew up at the Rendezvous in Dean Street, Soho. The threesome went through the little white door and were at once received by an important foreigner with dress clothes and a manner, who waved his hand and smiled benignly,—a sort of Peter at the golden gate, thought the artist.

“A table for three?” The accent was French.

“I reserved one upstairs by telephone,” said Ruddy.

The man went on smiling and directed them to the staircase. There were one or two nudgings and smiles as they made their way through the tables. Red hair is very aggressive in the male. But Angy was radiant. She had dressed her hair in a new way and was wearing her favourite evening frock,—a Cambridge blue. It was just as well that it was her favourite because she had no other, and at least it had the merit of not being done to death. She could count the number of times she had worn it in the past six months on half the fingers of one hand. But what did she care? Ruddy had got his foot on the ladder at last, which was excellent; and the chime of wedding bells was in the air, which was even more excellent if that were possible.

They were shown to a little table in a corner behind the door and beside it, waiting for them, stood a bottle of champagne in a bucket of ice.

Ruddy bowed to it profoundly. “It is a pleasure to see you looking so well, Madame Clicquot,” he said, “but where is your charming twin?”

The Hour of Conflict

Angy had worked miracles during the drive from Eaton Square. Happiness radiated from her in waves. She chattered and laughed and her eyes sparkled irresistibly. She was bubbling over with life. It was infectious. Everard, who had been saved from death in spite of himself, slowly caught it from her until he began to look upon himself as a madman ever to have thought of suicide. Death was not the way out. Life was,—life and light and laughter and pretty faces. And so he resolutely flung the burden of remorse from him, forgot everything but the moment and with the tremendous back swing of the pendulum became more excited, more frivolous than either of the others whose evening it legitimately was. Angy was delighted at the change in him and he and she hurled badinage at each other without ceasing, and without taking any notice of the other diners, stolid people, who looked at him askance.

Ruddy could scarcely believe his ears at first when Everard suddenly came out of his shell and began a duel of tongues with his little girl. In fact, he declined to believe his ears altogether and told himself that it was the reaction that had made Everard hysterical; that he was just as much out of control now as when ten minutes ago he had clung to his arm with the pistol lying on the floor at their feet. He wondered how long the reaction would last and prepared himself for anything during the evening. So while he joined in and shot off jokes on his own account he watched Everard closely. He decided to tell Angy nothing about it. It would only worry her and throw a damper on her enjoyment, and this was her evening and therefore nothing must be allowed to come in and spoil it. So he ordered a dinner fit for a king and talked schoolboy French to the waiter

The Hour of Conflict

who beamed upon them sympathetically, and his great laugh rang through the crowded room.

They ate tremendously and every time any one drank it was to a comic toast. There are curious moments in one's life when everything, however trivial, turns to laughter,—things which in normal moments would not call for the faintest smile. This was such an evening to the three young people with whom life had dealt so curiously.

The thought suddenly occurred to Ruddy: "I wonder how many others in this room have been blessed with such unmonotonous lives?" He looked around curiously at their faces to see if he could read their tale. Many of the men were tanned, but it was the tan of the English seaside rather than the imperishable brown of a tropical sun. Their womenfolk were quite ordinary people whom Fate had not overworried. Jogging contentment seemed to be their lot. To the right, in the opposite corner of the small room, was a party of seven, four men and three women. In some undefinable way they were different and to Ruddy it was very clear that they too were marking an occasion. He tried to work out the relationships between them. There was the host at the top of the table who might have been the brother of one of the other three younger men, a clean shaven, well-groomed man, who raised his glass and caught the attention of the others and gave a quiet toast with a little smile and clinked glasses all round. At his left was a mother, fair and of good complexion. Was she the mother of the pretty golden-haired girl with blue eyes and pearly teeth or of the very dark Apache-looking one whose hair was parted in the middle and coiled in two plaits, one over each ear and whose large grey-brown

The Hour of Conflict

eyes danced as she played with one of the long sticks of German bread which stood in a glass jug in the centre of the table? Of the other three men Ruddy saw that one, fair and round-faced with big glasses and tremendous shoulders, remained rather quiet and ate steadily. The one next to him was a whimsical fellow who seemed to be eating nothing and making fun at the expense of every one in turn, including the host and the mother at whose side he was sitting. The third was opposite him in between the two girls. Like the Apache he was very dark. A brother? No, for if he had been Blue-Eyes would have claimed all his attention. As it was she only received the few moments when he was not talking eagerly and excitedly to the Apache,—who at that moment was drinking a little private toast with him. The whimsical fellow opposite was watching them with a smile which might have meant anything.

Angy sent a little puff of cigarette smoke curling across the table. "What are we going to do next?" she asked. "I've got a feeling that there are adventures in store for us?"

"Shall we do a music hall and then go and see all the freaks at Gambrinus?" Ruddy lit another cigar.

"Very unimaginative," said Everard. "Look here, I heard some man downstairs talking about a fancy dress ball. If I can discover where it is will you come?"

"Oh, heavenly!" said Angy. "I should love to dance, but what about fancy dress?"

"That doesn't matter a bit. Tons of people go in ordinary clothes. I'll go and nose round and see if I can't get tickets." He got up, dodged a passing waiter, and the two saw him walk quickly out and disappear down the narrow staircase.

The Hour of Conflict

“Well?” said Ruddy.

“Well?” said Angy.

She put her hand across the table and touched the red haired man's for a moment and their eyes met.

Everard came back presently, his face beaming. “It's all right,” he said. “The man was still feeding, so I tackled him. It's a suburban tennis club giving an annual kick-up and they've hired Holland Park rink for the occasion. The man downstairs is the secretary and he looked a bit doubtful when I asked him if we three could attend the ceremony. So I told him we were thinking of moving into that suburb and would of course become members of the tennis club — if they would have us. You got your Blue for it at Oxford, Ruddy. Did you know that? Angy pulled off the ladies' singles at Cannes last year and I was runner up in France. That did it! He parted with these like a lamb — but for the life of me I can't remember what suburb it is we've got to go and live in.”

He put the three tickets on the table and the trio looked at them silently. Then suddenly they caught each other's eyes and went into fits of laughter.

“It doesn't begin till half-past ten,” said Everard, recovering slightly.

“What shall we do till then?”

“I vote that we return to Brewer Street and see if we can't work up some sort of fancy dress,” said Everard.

“Great notion!” said Ruddy. “Hi Monsieur le garçon apportez — moi le bill.”

The garçon apported the bill and helped them on with their coats and bowed profoundly as they went downstairs.

It was then about half-past nine. They went back to

The Hour of Conflict

the studio arm in arm and with much noise and excitement turned out drawers and cupboards in search for things which would transform them into fancy dress.

Everard whipped off his tie and collar, knotted a bandana handkerchief round his neck, combed his hair over one eye, slanted a cap of Ruddy's over one ear and slouched in as an Apache.

He struck an attitude! "Vive Montmartre! . . . What about you, Angy?"

But she was laughing too much to be able to answer. He made a very odd Apache in a white shirt and tail coat.

Ruddy snatched a rose from a vase on the mantelpiece and stuck it in the girl's hair. "Where's that shawl of yours, kiddy?"

Angy dashed into the bedroom and came back with a coloured shawl. Ruddy folded it, wound it round her waist and flung the end over her shoulder. "Viva Senorita Carmen!"

Everard and she began an impromptu tango, while Ruddy clapped his hands and sang in a voice that was never much more than three notes out of tune; and then, suddenly seized with an inspiration, he broke off and made a leap into the bedroom. He came back swathed in a sheet with a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes.

"Who are you?" cried Angy.

"Lord knows!" said Ruddy. "But I'm in fancy dress all right. Come on! To't again! Let us fare forth to Holland Park in quest of adventure."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE dance was one long laugh. The trio dared not meet each other's eyes. There were perhaps eighty couples, all of them a little self-conscious of their fancy dress and all on their very best behaviour, while fat chaperones and thin chaperones in their best Sunday-go-to-meeting garments — there was not one evening gown in the assembly — preened themselves, sipped lemonade and told each other tales of the wonderful dances they had had in their youth.

The Secretary, who had done himself very well at the Rendezvous, fussed round with a badge in his button-hole as if the weight of the world was upon his shoulders. He accomplished nothing in the most masterly manner and looked hot and sticky, and the chaperones caught his eye and nodded and said, "Really a most remarkable organiser, Mr. Browne-Jones, is he not?"

The men, most of whom were in evening clothes, wore buttons with the club's initials stamped on, while the girls had worked the colours in some way into their frocks. Scraps of conversation floated out from time to time.

"A lovely floor, is it not, Mr. Secker?" Their arms bobbed up and down.

"Yes, indeed, Miss Searle, I was just thinking so. You took the words from my mouth." His gloves were very tight . . .

"You do dance divinely, Mr. Ronker!" She half closed her eyes.

The Hour of Conflict

"Glad you think so. I go to all the hops round about, you know . . ."

The arrival of the trio caused a buzz of conversation among the chaperones and the members of the club seemed inclined to resent them. Several of the men found the Secretary and told him so. They watched Everard and Angy sail into a two-step with a lack of solemnity that struck them almost as sacrilege. But they very shortly accepted the Secretary's explanation — Angy was decidedly pretty — and asked to be introduced.

Meanwhile the chaperones very nearly upset their lemonade in horror. Who was this girl who came to a dance alone with two men? Did she know nothing about the etiquette of dancing? It was unheard of. Really, Mr. Browne-Jones ought to be a little more careful! But their charges pretended not to hear their criticisms. They looked upon Everard with a very favorable eye and it was obvious that the red-haired man was a fine dancer, and, if he *was* ugly, he was a real Oxford tennis Blue. Just fancy!

Browne-Jones was a man of brains. He scented the ill feeling at once and to counteract it spread about the news of who these people were. One Oxford Blue, a girl who won the ladies' singles at Cannes, and the other Oxford man, runner up for the French championship. After that what did it matter whether they had a chaperone or not? They were the right people. They could do anything. And what was more, think what a feather they would be in the club's cap! Why, next year they would win everything, sweep the board. If anybody grumbled after that, he would resign the secretaryship, then and there. Browne-Jones twirled his moustache.

The Hour of Conflict

"The upper ten don't bother about chaperones," he stated. "Chaperones, indeed!"

He had said that the trio could do anything. When their fame had spread through the room, they did. Everard captured maidens from under the very noses of their rightful partners, and danced with each one as if he loved her passionately. Angy found herself surrounded by men of the type she met in the office, very highly collared, with comic clothes,—red handkerchief peeping forth as though by accident between their shirts and their waistcoats, black ties with tail coats, coloured waistcoats and up and down collars. Every man she danced with talked tennis and asked her about Cannes and how long she had been playing. Angy had never played tennis in her life and when she guessed that these references were in connection with the story Everard had made up at the Rendezvous she went into silent fits of laughter and dodged them with a quickness that she never knew she possessed. Everard and Ruddy were introduced to dozens of girls with whom they had already danced, by Browne-Jones, who began to feel that it was the triumph of his life to have discovered these people. He took the entire credit upon himself, and now addressed them as "Leyden, old man," "Laleham, my boy," and whenever possible placed a hand on their shoulders,—the privilege of an intimate friend.

The two tumbled to the joke when their partners began asking them how long it was "since they were at Oxford University." They arranged to have every second dance with Angy, so that they could really laugh and not have to bottle it up too long, and when they were not dancing with her they picked out the prettiest girls in the room. Under their hilarious influence the stiff-

The Hour of Conflict

ness of all these people began to evaporate. The girls laughed more freely and danced as though it was not a test of good manners but something to enjoy. The men forgot to shoot their cuffs and look as if they had swallowed pokers, and even the chaperones dropped their antagonistic attitude after a time and condescended to smile once more at Browne-Jones.

When the time came for supper, Everard invited the secretary to join their party and it was the proudest moment of the little man's life when they all four clinked glasses and Everard with a very grave face and portentously solemn voice thanked him for the wonderful evening he had given them and made inquiries as to suitable residences in the locality of the tennis club and asked him to have the extreme kindness to propose their names for election to the club without further delay.

It was an uproarious evening and when somewhere about half-past two in the morning, they put a tired but very happy Angy into a taxi and crowded in after her and began to give grotesque imitations all together, one would have thought that in all their lives there had never been one thing to give them a moment's worry or regret.

They drove around to Eaton Square first and deposited Everard on the pavement. A more disreputable object was never seen as he leaned in the window of the taxi, still laughing, with the old cap on the back of his head, his hair ruffled, his shirt front crinkled and the coloured handkerchief flapping round his neck.

"What an evening!" said Ruddy. "I shall dream about those people for weeks."

"Oh, but it was funny. I still ache from laughing."

Angy gave Everard her hand. "Haven't you thoroughly enjoyed it?"

The Hour of Conflict

"I feel years younger." Everard grinned sleepily and stifled a yawn. "I don't think I've ever been so amused in my life. They all took it so seriously. And that little Secretary. Didn't he do us well? Oh, my Lord, I am tired! I shall sleep like a log to-night. Good night. I'll look you up to-morrow some time just to see if you've survived."

"Good night, old man," said Ruddy.

"Good night," said Angy.

Everard stepped back and waved his hand and the taxi cab went on. He stood and watched it until it turned the corner. Then he stretched himself and gave a little laugh and went up the steps humming a waltz.

A policeman came up noiselessly in his rubber shoes and watched him fumble with the latchkey.

"Jolly night," said Everard. "Fine day to-morrow, don't you think? . . . Good night." He nodded and went in and shut the door quietly behind him. Another yawn would not be resisted. "Oh, Lord, I am tired!" He said the words aloud and laughed again. He touched the switch and paused for a moment to get used to the darkness and then felt his way upstairs by the banisters.

He went into his room whistling quietly to himself, turned on the light, tossed the cap on the table, and picked up a pipe. It was lying within an inch of the revolver. His hand touched it as he took up the pipe, but it only had the effect of making him murmur, "Silly ass. Fancy thinking of *that!*"

He took up a silver match box with his initials on it and lit up. The silver was slightly tarnished. He breathed on it and rubbed it on his coatsleeve. Then he laid it down again, began humming the waltz and took

The Hour of Conflict

off his coat and unknotted Ruddy's bandana handkerchief. His watch said ten minutes to three. He wound it sleepily and then went over to the bathroom.

As he stretched out his hand to turn on the water, the waltz died on his lips and he felt a thrill of deadly sickening terror shoot through his heart. He felt that there was some one, something in the room with him. His pipe dropped from his hand and clattered on the linoleum of the bathroom. He dared not turn round. For seconds he stood there shaking, icy cold, trying to explain it away, his heart kicking against his ribs.

"My God! . . .?"

Sweat broke out upon his forehead. There had been no noise of the door opening, not a sound of any kind, but . . . some one was looking at him, gazing steadily at him. He could feel it through the back of his neck. He set his teeth and wrenched himself round and shrank back against the doorpost.

Had he really shot himself after all? Was he facing his Maker?

Words broke from him in a strange, strained voice.

"Who are you?"

The Something that he thought he saw made no motion.

"Who are you?"

And then behind the Something Everard saw a little white bed and a girl lying on it with her hands folded reverently across her breast and from the buckle of her shoe dangled a strand of seaweed.

The word Remorse clanged like a gigantic bell in his brain.

The fear that was shaking the boy left him and he burst forth in a mad rage. "Why do you hunt me like

The Hour of Conflict

this? Why do you drive me like an animal into a corner? Why can't you let me alone, curse you? Go and find some one else. Go and drive some one else to desperation. Was it my fault she threw herself into the sea? Do you think I wanted her to? Don't you see I love her still? Haven't I said I'd give anything to put back the clock, to undo what I've done? What chance have I ever had? Who could expect me to keep straight? Let me alone, I tell you. You've driven me to try and shoot myself. What else are you going to make me do? Don't stare at me like that. Take your eyes off me, damn you!"

He broke off and tried to look away. It was impossible. He was rooted to the spot.

"By your own sin you created me."

The boy quivered as though the words had been whispered in his ear.

"My sin! Why was it a sin? I didn't mean it to be a sin. Would there have been a sin if Toinette hadn't drowned herself? Are Ruddy and Angy committing a sin? I'm no different from millions of other men. Why do you pick me out like this? It was not my fault that she drowned herself. It was yours. You preyed on her as you're preying on me. You drove her into the sea, as you're trying to drive me mad. You coward to treat a girl like that. You bully! God! if I could get at you, I'd tear the life out of your throat."

He struggled to get away from the wall and his voice was almost a scream of agony. All the strong emotions which he had already been through that day seemed to be reacting on him. It was as if they had all merged in one great wave and now this wave was towering above him and would topple over and break and overwhelm

The Hour of Conflict

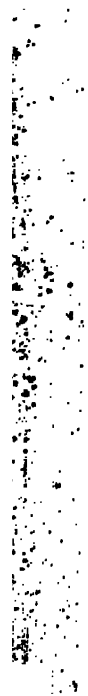
him at any moment. His rage surged through him and the veins stood out on his neck and forehead. And then with a rush of bitterness the boy felt the uselessness, the impotence of his anger. He was so small, so puny, so ineffectual against the inexorable calm strength of the silence that swallowed up his words. He felt like a small child before some giant. He held out his hands clasped in supplication, and fell on his knees, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Let me off!” he sobbed. “Let me off! I can’t bear it any more. I didn’t think. We neither of us thought till it was too late. It was a moment of impulse. I am very sorry. I will do anything to make it up. Tell me what I must do, anything you like, only let me off. Either kill me or for God’s sake let me go.”

And the sun, waking to a new glad day to the music of the chirping sparrows, crept in and put out the electric light and rested on a haggard, wild-eyed boy who knelt and cried out, “Let me go! Let me go!” to an empty room.



Part III



CHAPTER I

A GAINST the wall of the little old stone church was a bench just by the sacristy door. There were large candlesticks on it, winking in the afternoon sun. The door was open. It was not a very small door, but when the Abbé Guerchard came out into the garden with two more candlesticks in each hand, he had to stoop. There was an apron tied round him, an old gardening apron of blue linen much stained and patched and his sleeves were turned up to the elbow. The muscle of his big fore-arms was kept hard in the kitchen garden and their brownness spoke of the loving care with which he looked after his friends, the flowers—roses, sweet peas, holly-hocks, lupins, sun-flowers and many more,—all destined either to grace the altar in the little church or to gladden the eye of a sick parishioner.

He placed the candles down, returned into the church and brought out more. After three journeys the sacristy was empty and the bench nearly full. So he sat himself down on a corner of it and took up a rag and a tin of metal polish and began his task of cleaning. He was silent at first listening to the voice of the warm still afternoon,—the nodding and whispering of the flowers, the little impatient shake of a tuft of leaves on the branch of one of the apple trees, the lazy booming of bumble bees which floated near and went away and then came back again, the outpourings of a bird which, as he did, felt all the beauty and peace of nature.

The Hour of Conflict

He raised his head and looked out over the low stone wall to his left and saw, across the heads of his flowers, the sea, calm and sparkling in the distance with a tiny patch of white showing where a fishing boat was rocking up and down. He began to sing very quietly as he rubbed away at the brass candlesticks, a quaint rhythmic song of the fisher folk, rather plaintive, as of one who has felt the touch and heard the call of the mysterious deep.

“Monsieur l'Abbé! . . .”

There was a smile in the priest's eyes as he heard the call come down the winding path that led from his house. “Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!” he murmured, “what should I do without that good soul?” He raised his voice. “Here I am.”

After a moment there was a shuffle of slippers on the path bordered by gooseberry and currant bushes and patched with an intricate lacework of shadows, and then a fat, round, oldish woman appeared. Her hair was touched with grey and her face was wrinkled like a dried apple, but her eyes twinkled merrily as she stood some distance off, one hand behind her, the other wagging a reprimanding finger at the big priest.

“What is come to your memory?” she cried. “La! la! la! were it not for me I think you would forget to eat, forget to go to bed, forget that you have duties to yourself as well as to others.”

The Abbé Guerchard smiled back at her, but he did not stop cleaning his candles. “What is my latest crime, my good Thérèse?”

“Crime? . . . Ah, that is a good one! The idea of Monsieur l'Abbé committing a crime, for example!” Her breast heaved with the bigness of her chuckle. Then

The Hour of Conflict

she recovered herself and assumed an air of great severity. "What has Monsieur l'Abbé done with his pipe and his tobacco, hein?"

So *that* was why she hid one hand behind her ample person! The Abbé bent over his candlestick to conceal a smile. "How should I know?" he said. "I left them . . . tiens! where did I leave them?" He felt in the pocket of his soutane with one hand. It was of course empty. He withdrew it with an exclamation. "I thought I had put them there."

Thérèse's finger waggled again. "Ah—h!" There was deep triumph in that expression. She walked across to the bench and the left hand at last came out of hiding, together with the pipe and tobacco. "In two minutes you would have left your precious candles and been compelled to return to the house for them, is it not so? What is more, I have not forgotten the matches."

The Abbé Guerchard put down the candlestick and the rag. "You spoil me, my good Thérèse," he said. "Not only do you make me lazy by bringing me my tobacco, but you encourage me to gluttony with your omelettes, your vegetable soup, your good chocolate and you . . ."

Thérèse interrupted quickly. "Oh, mais dites donc un peu, Monsieur l'Abbé! Gluttony indeed! Who is it that leaves more than half of every meal—which would go to waste did I not make use of all my knowledge in the kitchen. Mon Dieu! If I did not coax, beg and insist you would become a scarecrow in a very short time. And then who, pray, would look after the church, who would look after all the sick and old, who would teach the little ones on Sundays? Glutton indeed!" Her indignation was boundless.

The Hour of Conflict

The priest struck a match and waited patiently till the spluttering sulphur had given place to flame. Then he lit his pipe and the fat old housekeeper's wrath subsided as she watched the blue smoke curl up and float slowly away.

The candlesticks seemed to give her an idea, for as she glanced at them her face took a very serious expression and it was with a lower tone that she said: "It is for the burial to-morrow that you are polishing them?"

The Abbé Guerchard nodded and paused as he was about to resume his polishing and looked out over the sea. The eyes were full of pain. "Why is it," he said, almost as though he had forgotten the old woman's presence, "that that calm limpid water should be lashed into violence and take its toll of lives? Why does the good God call his children so unexpectedly? If they are old one can understand. But when they are young and fair and good — then it is very difficult to see His reason." He heaved a sigh and turned abruptly to the candlesticks.

Thérèse made a helpless gesture with her hands and echoed his sigh. She interpreted correctly the pain in his eyes. "It would have been little Pierre's birthday to-day," she said. "Poor Madame Lemarchand!"

The priest looked up at her big kindly sympathetic face. "Ah, my good Thérèse, it is terrible! Three short days ago and the little fellow stood where you are standing, the sunshine playing on his hair, his face all smiles, the joy of being alive bubbling from his eyes. And now . . . now he has left us and the good God has one other child nestling in His arms. Jean Lemarchand and his two lads drowned in their boat! Good dutiful lads both,

The Hour of Conflict

and God has called them too. Indeed it is difficult to understand.”

Thérèse made another helpless gesture and turned about and shuffled back to her duties. And the big priest went on smoking and cleaning candlesticks and pondering deeply, while the sun shone on his face and nature carried on her work and the flowers bloomed, although somebody had been left behind. Just a moment's pause and then on goes life again.

It is difficult to understand.

CHAPTER II

THE following morning the sun for all its brilliance was not powerful enough to dispel the sadness that lay like a cloud over this small village of Ambleteuse. The Lemarchands were one of the little band of families who drew their living from the sea and among whom there was in consequence a great intimacy and camaraderie. Not only was their number thus decreased but their grief was made very personal and close. Besides, Jean Lemarchand left a wife behind him and relations, and were there not Jeanne Marceau who wept for Paul, the sturdy eldest son, and Annette Pellerand whose heart had gone with Pierre, the younger? No sun could comfort them. For them the bottom had dropped out of the world.

At five minutes to ten from the belfry of the little old church where their fathers and their fathers' fathers before them had been baptised and married and buried, there came the sad tolling of the bell and Annette's loud weeping burst out afresh and Jeanne shivered and covered her ears with her hands. But Madame Lemarchand, her face hard with silent grief, set out and joined the throng of villagers crowding to the church. Her loss was threefold. Her heart had dried up. She could not weep.

The three coffins were side by side at the altar rail and through the open door of the church a ray of sun came in and touched them softly, eclipsing the faint light of the flickering candles. On the draped altar the Abbé Guerchard was saying a requiem. The sound of his deep

The Hour of Conflict

voice as he read the solemn words of the service was interrupted here and there by a smothered sob, and the two small urchins, usually such distracted acolytes, knelt very still upon the altar steps.

And then at last the Abbé turned and faced the kneeling, reverent fisher folk and when he spoke his voice was full of emotion. "My dear brothers and sisters, our Father who loves us all and who has His reasons for everything, has desired that Jean and Paul and Pierre should go on ahead of us and join Him in His home. And though we may throw up our hands in an agony of grief and ask why these three in particular should be chosen, we may not know the answer until our time shall have come. That is hard. But since Jean and Paul and Pierre did their work honestly and well and lived as becomes good men, we know beyond all doubt that God has taken them into His heart. And so we must all go on comforting each other, being brave and loyal to the Father of Him who died for us. . . . Oh, my dear sister, tell God your sorrow and He will surely comfort you. When Jesus died did He not also leave a sorrowing mother behind? God will bring *you* comfort as He brought comfort to Mary, your sister."

During these simple words, Madame Lemarchand cowered where she knelt and buried her face in her hands. She did not want to listen. She wanted to be alone with her dead, alone as she would be in all the empty years to come. But the Abbé's words forced their way through to her brain by their very simplicity and directness and the tears which had dried up within her melted and ran down her cheeks and gradually the great numbness lifted from her heart and she told her sorrow to God, as the priest himself had done.

CHAPTER III

THERE were two men, obviously English, leaning on the wooden bridge which spanned the miniature estuary over into Ambleteuse. They wore flannels and carried straw hats and their faces were raw and peeling. They liked that and borrowed cold cream from each other at night as they retired to bed. They were spending their annual holiday in the village.

The sun was setting redly out over the sea and made a broad track upon the water from the horizon. To their right the cluster of small houses that was Ambleteuse, with here and there a larger villa boasting a private green garden, nestled down on the edge of the shore. Small, bare-legged children ran about on the sands and cried shrilly, their voices carrying far in the still evening. And in front of them the old fort jutting up on its rock out of the sea was very black. From behind came the faint clang of the electric train that carries people to and from Wimereux and to their left the digue ran in a broad curve all the way along the shore until it ended in the big Hotel Impériale whose windows caught the red light of the sun.

"Hullo," said one of the Englishmen quietly, "whom have we here?" The other turned his head and watched a big priest walking slowly along, his shovel hat tucked under one arm, a towel flung over his shoulder and a large black book open in his hands.

The Hour of Conflict

"The local padre. What about tackling him?" he said. "A good chance of improving our French. Wouldn't he make a fine Rugger player?"

His friend nodded absently. "Extraordinary thing," he said. "Compare our English country parsons to a chap like that. Would they walk about publicly reading their prayers in such an unself-conscious manner? I'm bound to say I like it. The absence of side about these fellers is astounding. . . . Now then you start in. Go on!"

But the other felt a surge of insularity go over him. His French was very weak and he didn't care to be laughed at,—particularly by a man in a skirt. So the friend gave a nervous cough and took his courage in both hands.

"Bonsoir, Monsieur," he said.

The Abbé Guerchard raised his eyes from his breviary and looked at the two men. "Bonsoir, Messieurs." He bent his head and did not stop his slow long stride. Neither of the Englishmen could translate anything quickly enough to shoot it off before he had crossed the bridge and they looked at each other with expressions of contempt. The fair one broke out, "I'm twenty-eight and you're twenty-seven and we've both had public-school education, and yet neither of us can say more than good-day in any language but our own. I think it's a dashed disgrace."

"Oh, rot," said the other. "French is only a hobby when you're earning your living. It doesn't help you to make money."

The fair man snorted. "A man *ought* to be able to talk French. Dash it, rise above money *sometimes!* . . ."

The Hour of Conflict

Besides, I wanted badly to get into conversation with that priest man. He's got a fine face, strong and full of character. I like the look of him tremendously."

And while the two men in white flannels argued their way along the digue, the Abbé Guerchard, totally unconscious of the fact that he was under discussion, climbed the winding street past the small wooden villas with resplendent names from whose windows hung drying bathing costumes and his lips moved as he read his breviary.

Suddenly there came to his ears the sound of quiet crying. He looked round and there on the road sat a small figure with tousled hair and short knickers and bare feet with toes that curled under and worked in the sand. He was giving way to a kind of jeremiad, murmuring the list of his sorrows and grievances to himself as his face became more and more stained with tears. The Abbé Guerchard crossed the road and stood towering above the child.

"Tiens! Tiens! Tiens!" he said. "What is it, mon petiot? Why all this waste of tears? Surely there is no catastrophe big enough to give you a face like that."

He stooped and lifted the little boy up. "Why, if it is not little Jacques! Bless my soul, I should not have recognised you."

The child stifled his sobs and crammed a fist into each eye and twisted it round. "Oui, m'sieur," he said.

"Well, well!" said the Abbé. "Where are your brothers? Have they gone on and left you all alone?"

Jacques nodded his head violently and his chest heaved with the manful effort to resist another explosion.

"Ah, mon vieux," said the priest with a smile, "it's like that, is it? But we men don't cry for such little

The Hour of Conflict

things, do we? We're too big for that. Come along, dry your tears and we'll go home too. Tiens!"

He put on his shovel hat and handed the child his leather-bound breviary. "Carry that for me, will you?"

The tears dried at once as the child took the book in both hands. Then the Abbé lifted him and carried him up the street, the small bare toes making little dust marks on his soutane and one tiny arm slipped round his neck. And so they came into the Grande Rue, courteously so-called, which was narrow and cobble-stoned and bordered upon either side by the shops. It was that quiet half hour when the holiday makers had answered the summons of the hotel bell and were changing for dinner. The work of the day was finished, and Monsieur Bonnot, a great bearded man clad largely in a vest and a white apron,—he did his own baking,—stood at his door and chatted with his next door neighbour, the marchand de vin, who conducted his business in a large pair of horn spectacles and a ready-made suit from the "High-Life" tailor in Boulogne.

"Tiens, Monsieur l'Abbé!" cried Monsieur Bonnot. "What have you picked up there? A new form of shrimp?"

"Bonsoir, mes amis." The Abbé raised his hat. "My little friend here was submerged in an April shower but now the sun is shining again."

The child was laughing. It was fine to go up the street on Monsieur l'Abbé's arm.

The marchand de vin peered at Jacques over his glasses. His voice was thin and reedy. "The rain has not washed the dust off the flowers," he said.

And Monsieur Bonnot shouted with laughter, and the Abbé hid his smile and said, "Never mind, petiot, never

The Hour of Conflict

mind," as Jacques, noticing that he was being laughed at, hid his head on the broad chest.

The marchand de vin laughed in a high titter as he and Monsieur Bonnot watched the two go up the street and past the turning which the Abbé should have taken to his house where his soup was awaiting him. Jacques lived some way farther. It would make the Abbé at least twenty minutes late.

Monsieur Bonnot nodded his head violently. "Oui dame, par exemple! It is luck to have so fine a fellow for our priest, hien!"

And the reedy voice of the wine merchant echoed the sentiment. "Oui dame! En effet!"

And presently the Abbé arrived outside the shop where Jacques lived, a tiny place with apples, pears, dried figs and nuts. Through the open door came a big voice. It was followed by a big woman who stood on the step with her great arms folded like a prize fighter. "Sacristi! There if you please is our Monsieur Jacques at last! Riding in Monsieur l'Abbé's arms as in a carriage. Mon Dieu! And making dirty marks with his feet!"

Jacques wriggled out of the Abbé's arms and stood on one foot smiling up at him.

"Ah, Madame Lenonnier, do not scold him! It is the privilege of old friends to make each other's coats dirty, n'est ce pas, mon vieux?"

The child nodded. The Abbé patted his shoulder. "Run along," he said. "Au revoir, Madame, I must not interrupt your dinner."

The woman bowed and caught up the child's hands. "Say thank you, Monsieur l'Abbé," she said.

"Merci, Monsieur l'Abbé," called out Jacques.

The Abbé waved his hand and Madame Lenonnier's

The Hour of Conflict

stentorian voice followed him for some yards down the road. Before he turned up the path to his house several shopkeepers, catching sight of him from the interior of their shops had hurried to the door to give a cheery bonsoir to Monsieur l'Abbé. But he was hurrying now. His watch told him that he was half an hour late and he knew that Thérèse would be on the lookout for him.

The storm broke indeed as the gate clicked behind him and he passed up the path glancing right and left at his flowers. Thérèse came to the door. "Ah, there you are! Enfin!" she cried. "What have you been doing now? And your dinner, eh? When I say that it is ruined you will believe me when I say that it is not fit to eat. Bathing? Mon Dieu, no! You set out to bathe hours ago. You have been doing some kindness to some of your worthless people. I know you. Why if you go on doing this much longer they won't any of them be able to eat unless you hold the spoon. They trade on you, they take advantage of your soft heart. Mon Dieu, why should *you* not be allowed to eat a decent dinner — and of course it is useless for me to point out that I have cooked it in vain, that all my thought and labour go for nothing. . . . Come quickly, quickly, before it is absolutely ruined, I beg of you, Monsieur l'Abbé. Juste ciel! if you would only think a little less of others and a little more of yourself."

Her eyes were full of reproach, but her hands were undoubtedly the most essential part of her outburst as she stood on the step,—quite oblivious of the fact that she was thus blocking the way and delaying still more the long-delayed meal. But when she ended and the priest begged her pardon and began to excuse himself,

The Hour of Conflict

she turned into the hall and rumbled off into the kitchen.

The Abbé contritely hung up his hat, sniffed at the honeysuckle which tumbled in a great riot over the porch and then obediently followed the kindly old housekeeper into the barely furnished room where he kept his books, ate his meals, received visitors, smoked his pipe and conducted most of the work of the parish.

It was almost in fact a clubroom. Nearly every night two or three men dropped in to ask his advice on questions of ethics or finance, to enjoy a little conversation, or to have a game of dominoes or chess,—at which indeed the Abbé was without rival in the whole of Ambleteuse. He was not merely the village priest. He was the personal friend of every villager. They told him all their plans, ideas and jokes. He knew all there was to be known about every one of them and was not only ready to do anything for them that lay in his power but went out of his way to do it before they came and asked him. The proprietor of the café did not complain that the Abbé's evening club took away his custom. He himself was a frequent visitor and the Abbé and he had many a bloodthirsty battle on the chess board.

When any dispute or unpleasantness arose in the village who else could decide the matter but Monsieur l'Abbé? The influence of this big quiet priest was quite extraordinary. Man, woman and child turned to him for sympathy and help, as they would have turned to a big brother. If they were ill the sight of his smile, the grip of his hand, the sound of his cheery voice were better than all the medicine in all the druggists' shops in the world.

And as day succeeded day in the unending routine of this small community the Abbé had no time to think how

The Hour of Conflict

much greater things he might have done out in the world. He was too busy. His life was too full in doing his work in his own little corner of it.

He remembered with a smile how that young Englishman who had been playing golf there a few months previously had compared him to a useless cabbage growing in an out-of-the-way corner.

Well, he was a cabbage—he thanked God for it—but not a useless one. He was not only content, but grateful at being stuffed away out of the rush and excitement and feverish emotions of the big world. He did not desire feverish emotions. They made one lose sight of God and one's duty.

But even such peaceful corners of the earth as Ambleteuse may be swept by tornadoes and at that moment Providence was preparing to pit the Abbé's sanctity against his humanity, to test him in the fire of passion.

CHAPTER IV

THE sun had long gone down and the little shops had put up their shutters with bars and bolts as if thieves might come in the night ; although there was not a single shop in all that village from which there had ever been stolen even so much as a button. The shutters went up more as a sign that work was done for the day.

Lights began to appear in the windows. From the door of one of the cottages, a stone cottage, thatch covered, that nestled almost under the church wall, there came forth a girl with yellow hair and sparkling eyes. She came into the street at a run followed by the light through the doorway and a woman's voice, shrill and irritable.

“ Do not be long, Marthe ! ”

Marthe flung a careless assent over her shoulder and went down the street, quick-eyed for anything that might chance to appear. She had snatched at the opportunity of getting tobacco from the Café to fill her father's empty pouch. The evenings were tedious to her. To help her scolding mother clean dishes while her father filled the stuffy living room with reeking smoke during the hour before bed was to the restless caddy girl a test of patience,— a test in which she always failed.

And so it was with delight that she made her way slowly down the village, peering to right and left. She was not going to hurry. Not she ! She flattened her nose against the dark window of the baker's shop and

The Hour of Conflict

sighed heavily at all the cakes waiting to be eaten — but not by her. The sound of footsteps made her look round quickly. It was the clockmaker on his way to the Café for a grenadine.

“Bonsoir, Monsieur Poiret,” she said.

“Ah, petite Marthe!” The clockmaker nodded. “Your bon ami is keeping you waiting, eh!” He laughed and passed on, pleased with his little joke.

Marthe sniffed. “Imbécile!” she muttered and, waiting till he had disappeared into the darkness, continued down the street till the lights of the Café shone out and she could see several men inside playing dominoes. Then she heard other footsteps coming in the opposite direction,—from the highroad. They dragged and shuffled and she waited, her hand on the door handle, with childish curiosity to see who it might be.

After a moment a figure came into the light, hatless and dusty.

Marthe peered, gave an exclamation, and took her hand from the door, her heart beating quickly with excitement. “Mon Dieu, it is Monsieur Leyden!”

She stepped quickly out into the middle of the road and planted herself in front of the man whose face was drawn and white. She grinned up at him with a taunting expression in her eyes. “Ah, Monsieur Leyden!” she said. “So you have come back, eh! You are going to play golf with Toinette again among the sand dunes? . . . I have not forgotten!”

An expression came into Everard’s eyes which the child could not understand. He raised his hand as though to strike her. She understood that, however, and dodged away into the Café with a mocking laugh.

Play golf with Toinette!

The Hour of Conflict

Everard repeated the words to himself as though their meaning had not penetrated his brain. The light from the Café window fell on him. He was white with dust from head to foot, his clothes all dishevelled, his hair unkempt.

He had landed at Boulogne that morning with one fixed idea in his mind. He was going to find Toinette. She had gone into the sea at Ambleteuse. He was going into the sea at Ambleteuse. It was the only way.

During the night journey from England he had sat just as he was, without a coat, huddled up on a bench on the deck, heedless of wind and cold, his head sunk on his chest. People looked at him and whispered and passed again and wondered.

Everard was not aware of their existence. He had been unable to go to Toinette by means of a revolver. He would follow her into the sea.

Boulogne was wide awake when the boat put in, but he could not wait for trains. He set off on foot. She was not far away now.

But he struck inland and as the sun became hotter and climbed higher up the sky, Everard trudged the dusty roads hour after hour heedless of the hat which a gust of wind blew into a field, heedless of dogs which barked at him, of people who stared as he passed through villages, of peasants who gave him bonjour in passing. He had to find Toinette. She was waiting for him at the bottom of the sea. She was calling him. He could hear the call, hear almost the very words, but the voice of the sea drowned them,—as it had drowned her. He must go into the sea to be able to hear her distinctly and answer her.

Hour after hour he walked, never stopping, never

The Hour of Conflict

seeing anything of the road, making unconsciously a long loop. Motor cars hooted at him. He did not hear. They passed him so close that they almost touched him. They covered him with their choking dust. Still he walked, foodless and without drink, his eyes fixed, his mind turning and turning on the one idea,—to find Toinette. She was calling him.

Cross roads did not make him halt. Blindly he wheeled into the first turn that presented itself until, halfway through the afternoon, a big stone tripped him and he staggered and fell on to the strip of grass at the roadside. He lay there exhausted, unconscious of the fact that he had fallen. In his mind he was still walking, he still heard the regular crunch, crunch of his feet.

It was a labourer returning from the fields who found him lying there and played the good Samaritan and set him on his feet.

Then without a word he started walking again straight into the sunset never saying a word of thanks to the staring peasant. But the extraordinary dazedness which had fogged his brain up to that moment lifted like a mist and for the first time he remembered the others who had been touched by the ripples made by the stone which he had cast into the pool—Toinette's father, her uncle, the Abbé. Toinette had left no word. They could know nothing of what had happened: only that she was dead. He owed it to Toinette to tell them. They must know. It was their right. He could not join her until he had confessed.

Everard shivered as he walked. It was impossible to confess. It was asking too much of any man. He could not face them and say what he had done. He had

The Hour of Conflict

been through those terrible months already. Was not that enough? . . .

No. He must confess. Toinette asked it of him. His soul craved sanctuary and without confession it would be denied. . . . Hippolyte Guerchard, her father? Or the Abbé, her uncle? Which? He remembered the huge sobbing father whose fingers worked in the bedclothes, who had looked up at him in dumb agony when he had entered the little white bedroom in which were the crucifix and the picture of the Madonna, and the girl whom he had killed. How could he go and tell *that* man that he was the cause of the tragedy? . . . the Abbé then? Yes, it must be the big priest. Those searching grey eyes which looked one through and through would be hard to face. The ordeal would be terrible. But it was for Toinette's sake and for her he would do anything, everything.

As the boy dragged one foot after the other he began to think out the way in which he could do it. He pictured himself at the priest's door, wondered how he would be received, thought of beginnings of sentences, cast them aside, decided that he would tell no one after all. But all the while the knowledge that he *must* tell grew and increased in his mind until it was as strong as his determination to find Toinette.

At last when the final afterglow of the sun had disappeared and the stars began to come out he found himself in the village, saw the fort sticking up out of the water and lights dotted here and there in the cottages.

He passed his hand over his forehead with a cry of thankfulness. It was as though he had been walking forever and ever in a nightmare and at last felt the first stirrings of wakefulness and release.

The Hour of Conflict

The village street was empty and dark as he went up, his heart beating wildly with the dread of meeting the Abbé.

Here and there the blackness was cut by lights from an open door, a low-set window, the entrance to the Café.

Then suddenly from nowhere had come that girl whom he recognised as the impish child who had caddied for him before . . . this thing happened.

“ You are going to play golf with Toinette again among the sand dunes ! ”

A surge of anger went through him. Toinette was dead. How could he play golf with her ! Could this girl know ? Was she taunting him with it ? He raised his hand to strike her and like a tantalising, impish spirit she disappeared again into the darkness leaving only a mocking laugh. Play golf with Toinette ! Did everybody know ? Was he a marked man ?

From the darkness eyes seemed to be peering at him, accusing eyes that read his secret. He shivered, looked round fearfully and hurried on up the street to find the Abbé whom he dreaded to face. He was afraid of the village and besides . . . he must not keep Toinette waiting any longer.

CHAPTER V

THE Abbé's garden lay slumbering in the still evening. The flowers had closed their tired eyes, thankful for the healing touch of the soft dew which soothed them after the parching day. The honeysuckle that scrambled recklessly about the porch successfully challenged the roses with its perfume and one or two sleeping birds murmured in their dreams.

Then the gate clicked and swung outwards with a shriek of rusty hinges and a man, dusty and draggled, passed between the nodding flowers. His steps were quick at first, but as he came near to the front door they slowed and hesitated as though they were in mutiny against the brain that drove them on. . . . Play golf with Toinette! . . . The honeysuckle leaned down and watched him as he stood on the step. Wonderingly it saw him put out his hand to the knocker and heard no knock. The hand fell back again. The man was breathing quickly as though he had been running a long way. His face was very white.

Everard turned round as if to go away again, his confession unsaid. For hours he had been summoning all his courage to do this last thing for Toinette. For miles he had thought out the manner in which he would do it. He had forced his exhausted legs to move quicker that he might the sooner get it over and have leave to go and seek the girl he loved. And now that closed door made him afraid. He cursed himself for wasting precious minutes. He told himself to go away and not

The Hour of Conflict

tell the Abbé. Perhaps he knew already. Marthe would have told him. Play golf with Toinette? . . . At last with a sort of rush he seized the knocker, against his will, desperately, urgently, and hammered on the door. It echoed and rang out through the quiet garden.

The noise of it made him gasp with fear. It was so loud, so terribly loud that the whole village must come running up to see what was the matter. They would find him, Toinette's murderer — because they all knew, they *must* know. He looked round fearfully over his shoulder, his ear strained for a footstep within, pulses hammering in his temples.

The noise was swallowed up by the silence. He stood there in the dark porch trembling, his fingers twitching, fear shaking him like an ague. Why didn't the priest hear? . . . In a second they would come running. Curse him!

Moments passed and there was no sound from the dark house. The boy broke away from the step with a cry and began running down the path away from that sleeping house where his soul would have found sanctuary, away from despair, away from life.

At the end of his path lay the sea.

CHAPTER VI

THE Abbé had been called into Boulogne to attend a conference in the cathedral. The discussion had lasted longer than was anticipated and it was after half-past ten before the priests from the church in Wimereux and himself had caught the tram car to return home from Boulogne. He said good night to them at the tram terminus outside the big church, crossed the bridge and began the ascent of the dark winding road which would bring him up past the Café Tardot and the Golf Club and so on to the digue. The extension of tram line which would have taken him in the day time to the foot of the dunes had long since stopped running. It was therefore a three-mile walk which faced him.

The road, shut in by sleeping villas and in dark shadow, first twisted up steeply in a big S, until, coming out on top of the hill and leaving the houses behind, the sea was spread out all white beneath the moon, and the road, no longer in shadow, ran gently down past the closed Café Guerchard, past the Café Tardot in whose windows there were still lights and so by the big Hotel, on to the digue. It was beautifully warm and the Abbé took the hill without hurrying. The affairs of the evening still occupied his mind and it was not until he had left the big hotel behind that he dismissed them. Then he stopped and looked out over the sea to where it met the sky and saw the great path of silver which but a few hours ago had been golden

The Hour of Conflict

from the sun. The tide was very full and lapped and gurgled at the stonework of the digue at his very feet and he calculated that even he, tall as he was, would be able to dive in were he in the mood for a midnight swim. But it didn't look so warm and tempting in that pale and creepy light and so he continued his walk. The sand made odd little mysterious rustlings in the dunes at his right as they shifted and slid, the thin dry rushes attempting to stem each miniature torrent.

Far away along, almost by the little Ambleteuse bridge, he made out a tiny black figure standing facing the sea. Some holiday maker, thought the Abbé, taking a breath of fresh air before going to bed. And as he walked, his eyes fastened on the lonely figure which stood motionless and slowly grew bigger as he decreased the distance between them. Perhaps it was a poet wrestling with a stanza, or a painter studying night effects. The figure was that of a man and he could see that there was no hat on his head.

There was nothing unusual about it except that the Abbé, who frequently took strolls himself before retiring for the night, had never seen any one there at that hour. He wondered whether the man would speak to him as he passed and whether he was an English golfer or not,—perhaps even one of the two young men who had said bonsoir a day or two ago. They were nice lads, he thought, well set up and healthy looking.

Suddenly the Abbé gave a cry of frightened disbelief, for he saw the man put his hands into his pockets and throw himself into the sea. Then he began to run at top speed, tearing at the buttons of his soutane as he did so until at last he wrenched it off and dropped it behind him and came to the spot where the man had gone in.

The Hour of Conflict

He paused for a second, thought he saw something black and dived for it. His calculation had been correct. The thought flashed through his brain as he struck the water and found that he did not touch bottom. And at that instant he touched something else and grasped it tight and came up, spluttering and gasping, holding on to the man's coat. It had taken him a full minute if not more to run and he was panting heavily. The figure was very limp and heavy in his hands and the Abbé asked himself if he were too late. The hands were still stuck in the trousers pockets, so there was no resistance offered as he struck out for the digue and with immense difficulty, keeping hold of the man with one hand, dragged himself up and then hauled the unconscious figure after him. He had never tried to restore consciousness to a drowned man before but he had seen it done, so he laid the man face downwards and did his best to pump the water out of him. Then he rolled him over on his back. "Mon Dieu! . . . Can it be? . . . Yes, it is that Englishman. . . . What is his name? . . . I have his pipe still. . . . Leyden, Monsieur Leyden! Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu! What can have happened? Poor, poor lad!"

All the time he was pumping Everard's arms up and down, working frenziedly.

It was an extraordinary scene. The sea went on lapping as if nothing had happened and the moon shone down on them, the wet Abbé in his breeches and boots, his hair all draggled, the steel buckles of his braces sparkling as he knelt and worked at the boy's arms, the boy's face very white, with sand at the corner of his mouth and pools of water dripping from his clothes. At last his chest stirred and he took a faint breath and then another

The Hour of Conflict

and his eyes opened and he began to babble things in English.

The Abbé took a deep breath of relief and got up. And then he caught a word of the Englishman's mutterings that he understood, just one word, Toinette. But he did not stop to ask himself what it meant. He picked the boy up in his great arms, all limp and dripping, and carried him swiftly over the wooden bridge which echoed with his footsteps and strode up the sleeping street, stumbling on the cobbles, panting and exhausted. At last, after an eternity, he kicked open the gate and went up the flower-bordered path to his house. The door was fortunately only on the latch. He flicked it up and staggered in calling loudly, "Thérèse! Thérèse!"

A frightened voice came from upstairs: "What is it?" and a creak of bed springs. The Abbé went into his bedroom and laid the boy on his bed and sat down heavily on a chair.

Thérèse appeared in a vast dressing gown and a ludicrous night cap. She was very frightened. There was that in the Abbé's voice which made her think he had met with a bad accident. And then she saw the figure on the bed and that the Abbé had no soutane and she was still more frightened. "Sainte Vierge!" she cried. "What is this?"

"Cognac!" gasped the Abbé. "Quick! Quick! Thérèse!"

For all her fright the fat old woman had her wits about her. She rose to the emergency nobly. In a flash,—it is astounding with what agility fat people can move in a crisis—she disappeared into the dining room and returned with a bottle of cognac, and a glass, and poured out some.

The Hour of Conflict

"You sit there, Monsieur l'Abbé," commanded Thérèse. "I will give it to the poor man here."

She was at the bedside in a moment, raised Everard's head slightly in her great hand and trickled drops between his lips.

While she was doing so the Abbé got up, took another glass from the washstand in the corner and drank a mouthful of the raw spirit.

"You must look after him, Thérèse, while I go and fetch the doctor." And out went the Abbé once more, still wet, into the sleeping street.

CHAPTER VII

THE window of the Abbé's room looked out across the garden to the sea. It was a big window that opened wide and in the morning the sun shone in and brought with it the scent of the honeysuckle and the roses and the songs of the birds; and occasionally a butterfly lost her way and fluttered in.

But now the sun was shut out. It must not be allowed to disturb the sick boy who tossed uneasily in the dim light while Thérèse sat by the bed and watched over him with the anxious eye of a mother.

"C'est grave!" she said to herself. "Monsieur le docteur remained here more than an hour and then came out with his face all wrinkled. Fever of the brain, mon Dieu! Pauvre garçon!" and she rose and put down her knitting and turned Everard's pillow and murmured soothing things into ears which neither heard nor understood.

The successive shocks of all these strong emotions during the last months had brought this high-strung boy very near to madness. After the doctor had made a thorough examination of his condition on the previous night he told them very gravely that it was brain fever and before going had given the Abbé instructions as to what to do until he came again. Whereupon the Abbé got into dry clothes and sat up all night. He knew no English and the boy's ravings at first contained no meaning. But now and again there came broken sentences

The Hour of Conflict

in French and Toinette's name ran through all he said like a leit motif.

The long summer night dragged slowly through and the Abbé, having sat in a stiff chair until every muscle ached, slipped off his shoes and walked up and down the bare polished boards noiselessly in his stockinged feet; and all the time the uneasy mutterings of Everard were the only sounds to disturb the heavy silence.

Toinette! Why did this boy speak her name so often? Why had he thrown himself into the sea? Was there any connection between the . . . Mon Dieu, no! that was impossible, ridiculous! He told himself that it was unfair to listen to him in that helpless condition. It was worse than eavesdropping. Besides, Toinette was not a very rare name. There were other girls, and doubtless it was not his little flower about whom the Englishman raved. . . . But the boy must not be left alone, so how could he help listening? And if the girl of his delirium were English why did this boy talk to her in French? Why had he come across to France, to Wimer-eux, there deliberately to throw himself in?

He stopped in his pacing and looked at the boy. The one candle in the room threw his distorted shadow on to the wall. He struggled to sit up and the Abbé stepped swiftly to him and held him gently down. But the surge of questions would not be denied and they raced through his brain searching for an answer which the priest could not give. A great anxiety filled his heart, a vague uneasy stirring of alarm, of doubt.

There was something hidden here and it took possession of his mind. And then at last dawn had come, and Thérèse, and she insisted on his going to bed for a few

The Hour of Conflict

hours while she watched at the bedside. He obeyed her, almost meekly.

And then with the morning and the crowing of cocks far and wide and the awakening of the village had come again Monsieur Rudolfe Gonsard, the little old country doctor, to whom this case was the most exciting event he had had to deal with for years. Beyond births and deaths there was little to keep the old man busy in Ambleuse. The fisher-folk were hardy and strong and they bore their children with the unconcern of healthy animals. They died hard too, so that the most the doctor was ordinarily called in to attend was a cut knee or a broken finger. Consequently he made Everard's case his one thought and care. He was prepared to devote all his time to him. He even went so far as to brag about it. "Brain fever. Ah! Very grave, very grave indeed! But I can pull him round, all right. I have no fears. Why, when I was in Paris I made light of such a thing as brain fever! It was child's play to me. . . . You may leave him in my hands, Monsieur l'Abbé, with every confidence."

A pompous little old person, Monsieur Gonsard, with a mass of grey hair and grey beard parted in the middle and a habit of taking off his pince-nez every other minute and joining the tips of his long, thin fingers. His clothes were always very neat and he wore a little red button in his buttonhole and attended church on Sundays in a silk hat and bowed very formally when the villagers saluted him,—quite unconscious of the fact that they exchanged humorous glances as soon as his back was turned. He was, however, a most devoted husband. His wife, who ran to fat and wore the most amazing

The Hour of Conflict

bonnets, was the grande dame of the small community. Everywhere she walked she was surrounded with a halo of great stateliness and dignity. The doctor treated her with the greatest affection, coupled with an old-fashioned deference and courtesy that were very charming.

It was a matter of time, patience and constant attention, he said, and he gave the Abbé his assurance that he would use the greatest discretion,—forget altogether indeed,—as to the Englishman's having thrown himself into the sea. It was a point, *n'est-ce pas*, which concerned no one but himself, but nevertheless he begged to be permitted to offer his warm felicitations to Monsieur l'Abbé.

The Abbé accepted them in the spirit in which they offered and walked down with the doctor to the gate. "Then you think, Monsieur," he said, "that there is no serious danger, no need to send him to the hospital in Boulogne?"

"Mais non! Mais non!" Monsieur Gonsard shook his head. "He is very well where he is. You and I will make a new man of him without having to bother about the hospital. . . . I will come in again during the morning. A toute à l'heure, Monsieur l'Abbé." He raised his hat and walked away.

"Au revoir, monsieur," said the Abbé and he turned back towards the house with a load lifted from his mind. He felt no after-effects of his strenuous midnight swim. The few hours' sleep had thoroughly refreshed him, mentally as well as physically. For when he came out of the old stone church from saying his daily mass at seven o'clock which was attended by nearly every woman in the parish, and many of the men, he wondered at the

The Hour of Conflict

extraordinary twist his mind had taken during those hours of darkness and came to the conclusion that the excitement of the rescue, the surprise of finding Everard and the fatigue following the effort of carrying him nearly half a mile had shaken him out of himself, had unbalanced him for the time. He dismissed the whole thing definitely and forever.

It was a very new responsibility which faced him and he thanked God for having Thérèse to rely on. The masterful way in which she had taken things in hand ever since he brought the boy in showed him a new side of her character which he had never suspected. So he prepared himself to play second fiddle to her.

She, on her side, realised that in the face of illness she was the stronger and she ordered the Abbé about, told him to fetch things, commanded him out of the sick room when she had snatched a hearty meal and resumed her position as watcher. She made a masterly head nurse and the priest smilingly obeyed her in all humility. They played quite a little comedy, these two, to which pompous old Monsieur Gonsard all unconsciously added his quatum. But on one point the Abbé was unyielding. He was going to sit up at night. That was not only his duty but his right.

Thérèse threw up her hands. "I will never permit it! It is for me, the woman, to sit up."

"On the contrary," said the Abbé. "That is the man's task. I will sit with him at night."

"But Monsieur l'Abbé, it is not right!" cried Thérèse. "You have your work to do in the daytime in addition to helping me in the sick room. It is not possible for you to remain up."

"Ma bonne Thérèse, supposing he takes a turn for

The Hour of Conflict

the worse. If I am asleep who is to run for the doctor?"

"I can call you."

"But if I am up that is quicker and it may be a matter where time is of the greatest importance."

"Then let us take it in turns. Let me rest until two o'clock and then you go to bed."

"No, that is not right. I will stay up."

"But, Monsieur l'Abbé . . ." And then it began all over again. Inch by inch she fought her ground, but it was in vain. The Abbé routed her with his absolute firmness in the matter and she was compelled to give in with what grace she could. She made up for it by assuming supreme command in the daytime so that the Abbé could be free to rest after he had completed his parish duties. She might be old and fat and fussy but she had a heart of gold.

CHAPTER VIII

THE thin face of the marchand de vin popped round the baker's door. "Have you heard?"

Monsieur Bonnot looked up quickly from a tray of patisserie all creamy and hot that was to prove the downfall of two small English girls. "Hein? Quoi? . . . The sick man at the presbytery?"

The marchand de vin nodded. "No more evenings with Monsieur l'Abbé for some time. What is it that he has, au juste?"

Monsieur Bonnot's eyes twinkled. "Something that you will never suffer from — brain fever!"

And the wine merchant's comic titter was drowned in the bull-necked baker's roar.

"Le malade au presbytère," was the one topic of conversation that morning, and the fact that he was English only heightened the general interest. The news had made the rounds before Monsieur Gonsard had paid his third visit. Everybody was asking who he was and how he got there.

While the wine merchant and the baker were still discussing it a small girl, tow headed and very sunburnt, entered the shop. "Bonjour, Messieurs," she said. "I want a loaf, please, Monsieur Bonnot."

"Ah, bonjour, Marthe," said the baker.

The wine merchant merely nodded. He did not like Marthe.

The baker took an enormous loaf and laid it on the

The Hour of Conflict

counter. "Ca va?" he said. "Dis moi donc, when are you going to begin to grow?"

Marthe's teeth gleamed. "It is not necessary to be fat to be intelligent," she said. "Some people see things before others are out of bed." She laid five sous on the counter, and picked up her bread. "Bonjour et merci."

The baker was interested. He would have liked a child like Marthe. She was bright and so mischievous. He liked high spirits. "Pas si vite!" he said. "Pas si vite! . . . Here, eat a cake and tell me what you have seen."

Marthe grinned and returned to the counter and helped herself after a close scrutiny of the tray of pastry to a chocolate éclair.

"Eh, bien, have you heard of the new arrival chez Monsieur l'Abbé?" She took another éclair at once.

"Pas si vite," cried the baker. "I did not tell you to eat the tray. And if that's all you can tell me you did not get up early enough."

Marthe grinned once more.

"Perhaps Monsieur Bonnot knows how he came there?"

"Ah!" said the baker, "that is what we would like to hear."

"May I have another cake?" said Marthe.

"Sapristi! Quel appétit! I hope you will be ill. Here!"

The child took it from his hand. "Well," she said, "I went out along the digue this morning shortly after sunrise while you were still asleep and I found something just the other side of the bridge."

Monsieur Bonnot and the marchand de vin were all attention. "Continuez donc!"

The Hour of Conflict

"I found the hat and the soutane of Monsieur l'Abbé," said Marthe.

"Quoi!"

"Comment!"

Marthe was pleased with herself. Each éclair was worth two sous. She told herself she would have one more before she left.

"What were they doing there?" asked Monsieur Bonnot.

"And what has it got to do with the sick man?" demanded the marchand de vin.

Marthe leaned on the counter and spoke with an air of great importance. "I took them back to the presbytery just now," she said, "and there were clothes drying in the sun,— Monsieur l'Abbé's clothes and the sick man's also!"

"Tiens?" Monsieur Bonnot looked at the marchand de vin.

"Parbleu!" The marchand de vin looked at Monsieur Bonnot.

"Alors," said Marthe, "Monsieur l'Abbé must have found the Englishman in the sea, hein?" She put out her hand and took another cake, picked up her loaf again, nodded and said, "Bonjour, Messieurs," walked out of the shop munching and disappeared down the cobbled street, licking her fingers with quiet satisfaction. She could have told them the sick man's name and many other things, but she had enough cakes for one day. She would go far, that child!

And the two men fell to discussing this new aspect of the question.

The Abbé was besieged with visitors that day who came up the garden path on tiptoe and made anxious

The Hour of Conflict

inquiries as to the sick man's condition. It would have shown a lack of respect to ask point-blank whether or not Marthe's story were true and the clothes had disappeared from the line where they had been drying. True, the line was still there. But that meant nothing. It was always there. And as the Abbé told them nothing they went away again as mystified as they came.

At eleven o'clock, after the Abbé had finished his evening meal and the doctor had settled the patient for the night,—very satisfied with his condition,—and had taken his departure, Thérèse crept into the sick room again.

The Abbé looked up from his book and raised his eyebrows. Thérèse ought to have gone to bed. She made a sign with her hand as if to say, "It is well. I am just going," and came across to him. She had something in her hand and the much-discussed clothes under her arm.

She put her mouth to the Abbé's ear. "I have just ironed his coat and trousers," she said. "I will put them in the drawers over there and then I am going straight up to bed. These are the things he had in his pockets, and look, there is a letter for you." She handed him a watch and chain, a handkerchief, washed and ironed, a cigarette case, some gold and silver and a letter addressed to Monsieur Guerchard.

The Abbé took them silently and nodded.

Thérèse softly opened a drawer and laid Everard's clothes in it. Then she went noiselessly to the bed, looked at Everard for a moment, shook her head and went back to the door. "Good night, Monsieur l'Abbé," she said. "There is nothing more to be done."

"Good night, Thérèse," said the Abbé. "God bless you."

The Hour of Conflict

The door closed quietly and the Abbé was left to his long vigil. He carried the watch, the cigarette case, the handkerchief and the money over to the mantelpiece, leaving the letter lying on his book. The only light in the room was one candle placed so that it should not shine on the boy's face.

The window was open and the Abbé went and stood there. A bird made a sleepy sound in a bush close by, but the boy's heavy breathing continued undisturbed. He had ceased talking to himself and lay quiet as though exhausted. For a long time the Abbé looked out over the moon-lit garden and watched a cat with large green eyes creep out of a dark bush and leap up the wall and disappear.

Then he went back to his chair by the candle and picked up the book and the letter and sat down.

Monsieur Guerchard was written on the envelope. Why not Monsieur l'Abbé Guerchard? And anyhow why had the boy written to him before throwing himself in the sea?

The letter bore the marks of the sea and crinkled loudly as the Abbé took it out of the unsealed envelope. He looked up quickly to see if it had disturbed the boy. Everard moved slightly but that was all.

So the priest very carefully unfolded it and spread it out. The paper was undated and bore no address and in places the ink had run. It was written in French. The Abbé held it close to the candle and read it.

"Monsieur Guerchard:

"I have tried not to write this. But I have got to. Something drives me to do it. I cannot go without confessing to you that I was the cause of your daughter's death. We loved each other passionately. We met every

The Hour of Conflict

afternoon on the sands. I made her lie to you about it. The night before she was found in the sea I climbed into her bedroom. I was carried away. It was my fault. God knows I have regretted it. No, there is not a God. I have found that out since. I will not ask your forgiveness because there is no forgiveness possible. There is only death. I have had my punishment. I have been through hell ever since, night and day, without ceasing. I tried to shoot myself in London. Something stopped me. There has been Something behind me all the time, Something that has brought me back to Wimereux to drown myself where she threw herself in. You will get this afterwards.

“EVERARD LEYDEN.”

The bolt had fallen. For minutes the Abbé stood holding on to the mantelpiece staring blankly at the letter which was meant for his brother, his hand trembling violently.

Two of the sentences rang through his brain like horrible discordant bells. “I climbed into her bedroom.” . . . “I was carried away.”

The Abbé spoke them aloud. There was no feeling in the way he said them. It was as though he were repeating something that had no meaning, like a child who has heard a grown-up use a long word and says it over and over as he plays with his toys.

This frank, honest boy had climbed into Toinette’s bedroom! . . . A terrible sickening feeling of grief and pain went through him. This little girl so sweet natured, so good, so happy, so full of life, who brought happiness and goodness wherever she went,—this God-sent child had known contamination.

The Abbé raised his head from his arms. Why? Why? Why? God Almighty, was it possible?

The soiled paper slipped from between the priest’s

The Hour of Conflict

fingers and floated down towards the bed whereon lay the one who had thrown the stone into the pond, and the Abbé fell on to his knees at the prie-dieu before the big ivory crucifix. His shoulders heaved and incoherent cries to God came between his sobs. That this little fair thing whose baby hands had crept round his heart, whom he had taught to spell, whose tiny fingers he had guided when they first held a pen, whom he had watched grow up so graceful and so beautiful,—that she should have been violated, made a new and more agonizing wound than death itself. Death was, after all, but the voice of God. This was ten times worse than death.

His whole nature, his whole life rose up within him and cried out against it. It was too terrible. God could not allow such things. It was impossible. He was mad, dreaming. He had read the letter wrongly. He had not understood its meaning. There was some mistake. . . . Yes, that was it. He would read it again. Where was it? Where? Oh, yes, on the floor by the bed.

He rose, went across and picked it up, took it back to the candlelight and his lips moved as he half articulated each sentence. . . . Then it was true.

Very quietly he folded the letter and placed it under the candle-stick. It was true. Little Toinette. . . . The tears ran down his cheeks as he stood with bowed head, his hands on the mantelpiece.

“ I climbed into her room. . . . ”

The Abbé turned and looked at Everard and realised for the first time that the letter had been written by that boy on the bed. He had forgotten all about him. He had been so overcome by the terrible fate which had overtaken Toinette that it never occurred to him to inquire as to the cause of it all. The mist of tears cleared

The Hour of Conflict

from his eyes and he looked across at the flushed face of the unconscious Everard as he lay all huddled on the disordered bed. The big priest drew himself up and took a deep breath. So this was the man who had eaten his salt and who was worse than murderer. This was the thief in the night who climbed into bedrooms and stole a soul away. This was the betrayer, the Judas, the seducer, this *friend*, this frank, honest boy whom he, *he!* had saved from drowning.

A bitter laugh came from him at the hideous paradox. He had saved Toinette's seducer, had given him his own bed, was sacrificing his own night's rest to nurse him, — to nurse back to health this vile wretch, this lustful disgusting creature who could not control his animal passions, this coward who had soiled one of the purest of God's children.

And then this priest, this man of God, who had dedicated his life to being God's apostle, one of God's representatives on earth, whose gentleness and goodness and unselfishness had won him the love of every man, woman and child in the whole of Ambleteuse, to whom he stood as a living example of what a good man should be,— this priest forgot that he was a priest, forgot that he was a man and descended to the level of the boy on the bed for whom he could find no epithet bad enough. Rage took possession of him, black terrible rage that shook his whole body, and with outstretched hands and murder in his heart he moved towards the bed to wrench the life out of the boy's throat. At that moment the Abbé Jean-Paul Guerchard ceased to exist. It was Jean-Paul Guerchard, murderer, in the black clothes of a priest, who stood above the boy with every muscle taut and quivering.

The Hour of Conflict

With a sort of savage regret he realised that this helpless creature would be able to make no resistance. He would have liked a violent struggle so that he could bruise and batter and crush. He could inflict no pain great enough to compensate for the betrayal of his little flower. He told himself that killing this boy with his hands was like stamping out some venomous insect.

Had any of the villagers looked into that room at that moment no one of them would have believed that the tall man whose hands were clenched and whose eyes were bloodshot as he moved step by step to the bed, was the gentle, kind priest to whom the children ran when they saw him coming down the street and climbed about him fearlessly while he laughed and joked and gave them sours. Why, even the dogs wagged their tails and cats arched their backs and purred and waited to be tickled under the chin!

He jerked down the bedclothes from the boy's face roughly and leant down, and his great muscular hands felt their way round the boy's hot bare throat. . . .

At that moment the boy, wakened by the touch upon his neck, opened his eyes. They fastened on the Abbé's and a look of great eagerness came into them. "Toi-nette!" The voice came in a gasping whisper in French. "Greedy little thing! You haven't left me a single chocolate!"

Jean-Paul Guerchard's hands fell away from Everard's throat. That weak voice belonged to no venomous insect. It was the voice of a very human being, an exceedingly pitiful human being made in the image of the bon Dieu. A wave of shame ousted the rage in his heart,—shame and contrition and humiliation.

He was a priest again. Who was he to judge this

The Hour of Conflict

boy whose blood he might have had upon his hands if he had not stirred and spoken? The boy's sin had been committed in a moment of youthful impulse when he had been carried away. How could he judge when he too in a moment of impulse had been carried away and overwhelmed with the desire to commit murder, he whose life and training should have stood him in better stead? Even now the thought of Toinette stirred him again and shook his control.

He looked away from the sick man over whom it was his duty to watch, striving to put something in between them. He was afraid,—afraid of himself, of what he was tempted to do. He felt weak and yielding. His hands itched once more to be at the boy's throat even when his mind told him that he would be committing a greater sin than the boy was guilty of — because he was a priest.

A horrible struggle began in him, the struggle of the man against the priest. All the man in him cried aloud for vengeance — and the priest told him it must not be. The man in him made him clench his fists, and strain to leap across and fall on his enemy — the priest called to God for help. He stood there wavering in the middle of the room, his shadow large against the opposite wall, his face distorted with emotion,—while all unconscious that death was hovering round him for the third time Everard muttered and fretted in his delirium.

Beads of perspiration ran down the Abbé's face. He closed his eyes, not daring to look at the figure on the bed and at last he turned and stumbled over to the prie-dieu and fixed his eyes on the figure of Christ crucified and cried aloud for day to come, for release from that room, for strength to overcome temptation and for

The Hour of Conflict

forgiveness for having betrayed God's trust in him. He was not fit to be a priest. He, too, was a creature who could not control his passions and he bowed his head in bitter grief and shame.

The summer night dragged slowly through and when at last Thérèse came in, long after the dawn, she found him kneeling at the prie-dieu, his head down upon his arms, his face still wet with tears.

CHAPTER IX

“**B**ONJOUR, Monsieur l'Abbé,” said Thérèse in a low voice. “How has he been during the night? . . . But, mon Dieu . . . is anything the matter? What is it?”

The Abbé had risen stiffly from the prie-dieu and the white drawn face that he turned to her filled her with fright. He went across to the mantelpiece, lifted the candlestick, blew out the candle, took the letter, placed the candlestick down again and left the room without a word. The little fat old woman who had constituted herself head nurse, gave a glance at her charge, saw that he lay asleep and hurried out of the room.

“Monsieur l'Abbé, you are ill. You must go to bed at once. I told you that it was not right for you . . .”

The Abbé held up his hand. “C'est bien, Thérèse,” he said. “I will obey you in a moment. Go and look after the boy.”

Thérèse opened her eyes wide. Never, no never, had Monsieur l'Abbé spoken to her like that before. She stood gazing after him while he walked down the passage with the letter in his hand and disappeared into the salon. Then she threw up her hands and shook her head and went back into the sick room.

The Abbé went over to his little desk and sat down and looked at the letter as it lay in front of him,—those few short lines which had brought tragedy and shame to him. The garden outside was alive with the songs of birds and the fresh sweet morning breeze wafted the

The Hour of Conflict

scent of roses and honeysuckle into the room. For a long time the priest sat there very still. The feel of that soft throat was on his hands. Then he wrote something on a piece of paper and got up and tore the letter into small pieces. With the paper in his hand he left the room and went out into the garden and stood in the middle of the path. He was not fit to be a priest; how could he go upon the altar and say mass? He passed a hand wearily over his forehead and made his way down between his friends, the flowers, without taking any notice of them. Presently he came out by the bench on which he had polished the candlesticks. He pulled out the key of the sacristy door and let himself in. His footsteps rang out in the empty church as he walked down it to the front door. This he opened, pinned the piece of paper on the outside and shut and locked it again.

For a moment he stood facing the altar with three tall candlesticks on each side and little vases full of flowers in between them. Then he went into the last pew and knelt down.

Presently there could be heard footsteps outside the church door and then a murmur of voices. A new day had begun and the villagers had come to begin it by hearing mass. But there was a notice on the door which ran, "There will be no mass this morning. J. P. Guerchard." For several minutes the murmur of voices increased and multiplied and then gradually gave place to silence as the crunch of feet on the gravel died away in the distance. It was an event unparalleled in the history of the village. Not for years could any one remember a morning when there had been no service in the old stone church. And every one found a different

The Hour of Conflict

reason until it was said that of course the sick Englishman was the cause of it. He must be very sick and needed Monsieur l'Abbé. Perhaps he was even now dying. And so they went away quietly.

And the Abbé was left once more in silence to make his peace with God.

CHAPTER X

THE golden days that slipped by so quickly to the holiday makers, who bathed and golfed and lost their money in the Casino, forgetful of the year's work which had preceded their holiday and which would begin again when it came to an end, seemed very long to the village priest and his housekeeper. There were moments when the responsibility of caring for the sick man weighed very heavily on the shoulders of the uncomplaining Thérèse. She was not so young as she used to be in spite of all the goodwill in the world and she was glad to let the Abbé redouble his attentions in the sick room, for this boy who struggled haltingly through the valley of the shadow. His unexpected coming into their lives had brought about a revolution in the quiet atmosphere not only of the presbytery but of the entire village.

Monsieur Bonnot, the marchand de vin, and all their friends realised for the first time how great was their appreciation of the evenings of chess and dominoes and cigarettes in the Abbé's salon, now that these evenings were denied them. They were at a loose end after their daily work was over and although they congregated at the tables of the little café and sipped their bocks and grenadines with much conversation and laughter, yet at the back of it all there was a sense of some one missing.

As for Monsieur Gonsard, he took on a new lease of life. Never had he been so happy in Ambleteuse. To emerge from a sort of mental and physical coma brought

The Hour of Conflict

about by having nothing to do except attend to diminutive ailments of no significance, and find that he was really called upon to use all his knowledge gave him an increase of self-respect. The memories of his Paris days crowded back on him and when he woke in the mornings he began to think at once about his patient. He was always pottering to and from the priest's house via the pharmacie, thoroughly enjoying the small notoriety that Everard's illness brought him. People would stop him in the street.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Gonsard."

"Bonjour, Monsieur ——" or Madame, as the case might be.

"Eh bien, and how is your patient to-day?"

And Monsieur Gonsard would stroke his beard and nod his head and join his long thin fingers and look very important and scientific and say: "Ah, Monsieur, we are getting along well,—comme sur des roulettes! We shall be on our feet again soon."

That was how it always ended—"on our feet again soon." It was his watchword, his slogan, his creed, repeated daily to every enquirer. But when they had lost all count of the number of times he had said it and the holiday makers were gathering like swallows ready to fly and the shopkeepers began to talk over their profits during the season, there came a morning when the watchword which had become so tiresome was no longer heard, a morning when Monsieur Gonsard did not even stop, but waved his hand and hurried on, his face radiant with triumph and delight. It was a morning when Thérèse went about the house laughing absurdly, dabbing her eyes with an apron, speaking to herself and throwing up her hands and laughing again. She was

The Hour of Conflict

like nothing so much as a hen which had hatched out a weird and unknown bird from the one egg on which it had been sitting for weeks.

Her knitting needles had been clicking softly as she sat in Everard's room when suddenly she looked up from her wool to see him looking at her curiously. There was a difference in the look that caught her breath and she felt excited. She watched him turn his eyes round the room and take in the crucifix, the picture of the Madonna, the flowers on the table by the side of the bed and then look back at her again. A puzzled frown came over his face.

"Where am I?" he said, and then repeated the question in French. "Who are you?"

And Thérèse dropped her needles with a glad cry and got up. "Who am I?" she echoed. "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! I am Thérèse, but wait! Wait, I will go and fetch Monsieur l'Abbé," and she went out of the room at a run calling loudly.

The Abbé came quickly in bare-armed from the garden. "What is the matter? Tell me."

But Thérèse was speechless. She beamed at him and said, "Oh, mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" and waved her hand toward the sick room.

The Abbé left her there and hurried into the bedroom, wondering what could have happened. The boy's eyes met his as he entered and the priest hurried to him with gladness all over his face and sat down on the side of the bed and caught up the boy's hand.

Everard smiled at him and held his hand tightly. "Hullo," he said. "It's you! How splendid . . . Extraordinarily enough I was telling Ruddy and Angy all about you last night."

The Hour of Conflict

The Abbé swallowed. "Mon cher, this is the happiest moment of my life."

Everard went on beaming. The Abbé was such a splendid fellow and somehow at that moment the one man on earth he wanted to see. "How *are* you and where do you spring from? I'm . . . no end glad . . ." The voice trailed off. His eyelids drooped. There was a little sigh of great contentment and Everard was fast asleep.

The Abbé looked down at him as he lay there, clinging like a child to his hand. A throb went through his heart. "If I had killed this boy! . . . Oh, mon Dieu! I thank you."

And presently fat Thérèse tip-toed in, all smiles. Here were these two holding hands for all the world like father and son, and there was a smile on the boy's face as he slept. She crept out again and went into the kitchen and sang little things to herself quietly.

And time slipped by and there were duties being neglected, but the big priest sat motionless on the bed. Everard might go on sleeping for hours, but not for worlds would he have tried to release his hand. The boy was glad of him — this boy who had escaped death for the third time.

CHAPTER XI

THEY were days of peace and sunshine that followed,—days filled with kindness and great content. Everard's bed was moved into the window and he saw the sun fill the garden with colour and watched the flowers nodding and listened to the bumble bees and the birds. And besides all those things there was this dear little old woman who brought him things that almost ate themselves and sat by him with those funny old knitting needles making shapeless impossible garments and saying things that he didn't have to listen to. And then there were the periodical visits of the old doctor man who always made him want to laugh as he stroked his comic beard and felt his pulse with long thin fingers and made pompous remarks and stood about and wagged his head and bowed profoundly upon retiring. And what a great chap the Abbé was! He came and sat on the window ledge and the smoke curled away into the garden as he pulled at his bent old briar and talked or read to him. Or he would look up from his spade as he dug down there by the wall and wave his hand cheerily. And then Everard would stretch himself lazily and fall into long delicious sleeps that lasted hours and wake up to see Thérèse once more with a tray of jellies and things.

And from time to time the chimes of an old clock floated in from the distance as if it had suddenly waked up and remembered that it had to strike, and having

The Hour of Conflict

done so went to sleep again. And after that had happened several times, the church bell just round the corner jangled in the evening sunshine and the Abbé would look in and talk for a moment before he went in to hold his service.

Everard felt rather as a baby must feel. Whatever came in front of his eyes made a momentary impression. Beyond that his thoughts were unconnected. He was totally unable to concentrate upon any one thing for more than a second at a time. There seemed to him to be nothing unusual in the fact that he should be lying ill in the Abbé's house. He accepted it without question. As soon as an idea had floated into his mind it had disappeared again. He was very weak and had no wish to do anything. He was perfectly content just to lie there in his bed and watch the swallows flash and dip, and the bees work their way from flower to flower, climbing in and out of the foxgloves. Sleep came to him at all moments. In the middle of Thérèse's chatter or Monsieur Gonsard's pomposities, his eyelids would droop and he would drop off into a deep slumber. And every time he woke he was a little stronger, a little more alive.

The Abbé came up to the window one afternoon and found Everard awake. He wore no hat and his pipe made a little bubbling noise. "Eh bien, mon ami," he said. "Do you know that you have been asleep for two hours?"

Everard curled up between the sheets and smiled. "I shall be digging your garden for you in a day or so," he said. "Do you think I might smoke? That pipe of yours fills me with longing."

The Abbé considered. "I don't think a few puffs

The Hour of Conflict

would do you any harm. Wait a moment and I will get your pipe."

Everard dreamily watched him prop his spade against the window-ledge and go away. Presently the Abbé sat on the end of his bed, took out a pouch and began to fill the pipe.

"Here you are," he said. "It's some time since you had that between your teeth."

Everard took it and looked at it. It was a straight-grained briar of the kind you can only get in Oxford. Presently a frown came over his face. He recognised the pipe, but it was very strange the Abbé should have it. "Where does this come from?" he asked.

The Abbé held out a match. "You left it here," he said.

The match burned down to the Abbé's fingers. Everard did not notice it. He was working out the history of the pipe. He remembered distinctly buying it in Oxford from the place in the High. That was all right, but when had he left it in the Abbé's home? . . . Oh, of course, yes. He and the Abbé Guerchard had had one or two evenings together when he had been playing golf there last year. Was it last year? . . . Guerchard? Extraordinary thing! Why had that name suddenly come into his mind? . . . "You are going to play golf with Toinette again . . ."

He looked up suddenly into the Abbé's face, searchingly, intently, and the hand that held the pipe shook a little. Toinette . . . the Abbé. This man was her uncle, Toinette's uncle!

He lay back on his pillow limply. It seemed that the sun had gone out. "Oh, my God," he said. "Oh, my God!"

The Hour of Conflict

The priest bent forward quickly and asked him if anything was the matter? Was it a relapse? Should he have to run for Monsieur Gonsard?

Everard shook his head. There was nothing the matter except that . . . that everything was the matter. A series of pictures flashed through his mind,— Toinette entering the room as he and the Abbé were at lunch; the game of postman which she had played in the cave; her confusion when he had seen her pulling on her stocking in the dunes; her long plaits and white face looking down at him from the bedroom window, . . . the matter was that he was Everard Leyden. That was all.

He struggled to prop himself on one elbow and failed. So he shot out a question to the Abbé, lying down. "Did you find a letter in my clothes?"

The Abbé started. "Yes," he said.

Everard saw from his expression that he had read it. There was a long moment's silence. His fingers plucked the bed-covering. Then he looked up again. "Weren't you sorry you didn't let me drown?"

The Abbé bowed his head. The moment had come when he had to make his confession to this boy. He knew Everard's secret. Everard must know his. His pipe had gone out. "Yes," he said. "I was sorry—at first."

There was another silence. And then an extraordinary gladness came over Everard. For months he had gone about trying to find some one to confide in. His failure to do so had resulted in his trying to put an end to himself twice. And now here was this big man who knew and, in spite of that, had nursed him and been infinitely kind. He took one quick look in the Abbé's eyes and then looked away out into the garden.

The Hour of Conflict

Perhaps if he confessed now he would be allowed to die.

"I don't remember what was in the letter exactly," he said. "I will tell you . . . what happened."

The Abbé held out his hand. "No," he said, "don't."

"Please!" said Everard. ". . . That afternoon when I met . . . Toinette here and saw her home, I made her stop and talk down there in the dunes. When I first came here I heard her singing and decided to make love to her just to pass the time. It was a dog's trick. . . . I got to know her by going down to the café night after night. Then we met every afternoon in the sands and I really loved her. . . . She loved me, too. I had never been so happy in all my life. To feel her in my arms was the most wonderful thing in the world . . ." He broke off and his hand gripped the pipe. "Then the time came for me to go back to England. I didn't want to go. But I had to sooner or later. And one night I . . . I couldn't remain satisfied with her kisses. I climbed up into her bedroom. There was no excuse. I did it deliberately. The next evening she met me in the cave, our cave, and we said good-bye. She was terribly moved and couldn't believe that I was really going. And then — and then they told me at the golf club that she . . . was dead . . . I saw her lying on her little white bed, with her hands folded across her breast and there was some seaweed dangling from her shoe buckle. . . . Oh, my God . . ."

The Abbé covered his face with his hands.

"And then I went back knowing that I was a murderer." Everard continued deliberately, choosing his words with extreme care. "I've got to tell you this because you wouldn't let me drown. From the time I got

The Hour of Conflict

there I was haunted. I was afraid to go to bed because I went through it all over again in my dreams. In the daytime things reminded me of it and I went through hell. There was never a moment when I didn't pay. I deserved to . . . I bought a revolver. I wanted to find Toinette again. Something wouldn't let it go off . . . I couldn't find any escape. I was like a rat in a trap. At last after a dance when I believed I had found the way out I went back home late. . . . I think something must have happened to me then, for I don't remember anything very well after that until I woke here and you came in. . . . Aren't you going to . . . kill me now?"

He lay quite still waiting.

Presently a wet hand clasped his and then he heard the Abbé speaking in a voice he hardly knew.

"Do not say that! Oh, mon ami, mon ami . . . I have had your throat in my hands to kill you. I read your letter. Like Peter I denied my God,— I, who am a priest. I went mad. I cried aloud for vengeance. If you had not wakened and spoken Toinette's name when my fingers were about to strangle you I . . . I . . . oh, my friend, can you ever forgive?"

Everard looked at him with infinite weariness in his eyes. It was all to do over again. "Why didn't you leave me in the sea?" he said. "What is the good of being alive when Toinette is dead?"

An immense sympathy filled the Abbé's heart. The utter hopelessness in the boy's voice was more moving than even the halting story of his attempted suicide. "Oh, the pity of it!" he said. "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" He rose and clasped his hands behind his back and began to walk up and down the room, casting a

The Hour of Conflict

questioning look ever and again at Everard, who lay with closed eyes.

Then the Abbé stopped. "I have something to tell you, mon ami," he said quietly; "something that will come as a shock, a very great shock, but a glad one. Are you strong enough to bear it?"

Everard made a limp gesture with one hand. His eyes did not open. "What does it matter? Nothing matters now."

"You are wrong," said the priest. "Everything matters. You can begin again. The whole world is in front of you,—life, happiness and . . . and love. Toinette is not dead."

As if something had hit him violently, Everard sat bolt upright in bed, his face dead white, his mouth half open, his eyes burning the Abbé's.

"Toinette is not dead."

The Abbé repeated it softly, fearfully, but the words boomed in Everard's ears as if the whole world with one voice had shouted them.

He gave a sort of gasp that was a sob, clutched frantically at the bedclothes and fell back limp and unconscious.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Everard opened his eyes once more Monsieur Gonsard was bending over him, Thérèse was fluttering anxiously at the doctor's elbow and the Abbé was holding two bottles of something that smelt abominably.

"La, la, la!" said Monsieur Gonsard, wagging his head. "That is better. That is better. Mon Dieu, I will confess that I was frightened."

Thérèse clasped her hands in an ecstasy of thanks. "Sainte Vierge!" she cried. "He is alive once more."

"You feel better now, bien?" asked Monsieur Gonsard.

Everard disregarded the doctor and the old woman. His eyes found the Abbé's. "Where is she?" he asked.

"Patience, mon cher, patience!" said the Abbé, "or you will not get well at all."

Everard shook his head. "Tell me where she is," he demanded.

The doctor nudged the Abbé and whispered quickly, "Tell him anything, anything!"

Thérèse stood looking from one to the other in deep puzzlement. The Abbé's sudden rush for the doctor when all was apparently going well with the invalid had caused her considerable alarm. It was a matter of personal pride with her to see Everard on his feet once more.

The Hour of Conflict

The Abbé waved his hand at her and she left the room. Then he turned to the boy. "Toinette is in the convent at Boulogne."

"What do you mean—in a *convent*? My God, do you mean that she is going to become a nun?"

The Abbé nodded. "Yes," he said. "She has been there for two months."

The boy struggled up on one elbow, his face white with terror. Was he to lose her again?

"She can't!" he cried. "She mustn't. Fetch her out. For God's sake don't let her do it. . . . You've done this, *you!* You call yourself a friend and you sneak Toinette into a convent. Let me get up. You're keeping me away from her. I must go to her at once. You *shan't* put her in a convent. I'll burn the place down. I'll climb in. I must find her. . . . Doctor, make me strong again. Give me something, anything, quickly, so that I can get up. . . . Oh, God, I *can't* get up. . . ."

His struggles only made him weaker and at the end of his outburst he sank back on to his pillow, exhausted, broken, despairing. He was all out of control and tears came to his eyes as they would to a child's. "Don't let her do it. I implore you to save her, to give her back to me. I will do anything you say, you may punish me how you like, break me, only let me see her again. Monsieur Guerchard, don't keep me away from her, please, please! Tell me what I must do to make myself worthy of her. I will do anything you like, anything. Tell me. Tell me. . . ."

The Abbé put a hand on his shoulder and patted it, "There, there!" he said. "You shall see her, I promise you."

The Hour of Conflict

And the boy caught at his hand, speechless with relief and gratitude, sobbing heartbrokenly.

But though the Abbé promised that Everard should see Toinette, he was big with doubt, reluctance and questioning. His little flower had been saved from death and, in atonement, as he now saw, for her fault had decided to devote her life to the service of God. She had come to this decision herself, without any prompting from him, and naturally enough, he, being a priest, was very glad. He had always considered her too good and too pure for anybody's hands but those of his Master and the day of her entrance into the convent in Boulogne had been to him one of great rejoicing. He told himself that all the choirs of heaven must have rejoiced with him.

But now that she had definitely chosen her way of life and was protected against all the temptations of the world and the flesh, here was this Englishman who had once swept her off her feet clamouring to rejoin her. To take her from the convent now was to take her, metaphorically speaking at least, from God and give her to the Devil. For the Englishman had not only robbed her of her purity but denied even the existence of God. How could he, a priest, give her once more into the keeping of such a man? Would the choirs of Heaven rejoice if he fetched her away from the convent?

Once more it was a struggle between his humanity and his sanctity. It was a struggle between love and religion, between the world and the Almighty, and, as ever, he, the priest, was arbiter. What was he to do?

His priesthood made him cling to her plan of becoming a nun. It was her plan; why should he go out of his way to upset it? *She* had decided, and as she was

The Hour of Conflict

the pivot about whom they all revolved surely it was not for him to interfere. But there was that boy and, for all his weakness and denial of the Deity, he was just as much a child of God as Toinette. Then, too, those months in England when his conscience had driven him to self-destruction not once only but on two separate and terrible occasions,—were they not months of expiation, or atonement? Was it not indeed a proof of God's forgiveness that the boy should have returned to Wimereux and have been saved by the Abbé? Was not *he* thus chosen as the instrument to serve unseen ends?

There could be no argument. The Abbé told himself that he was the servant of his Master and to his Master he bowed his head. Toinette had chosen. Perhaps she had chosen wrongly. It was for God to decide.

“I will go and fetch her,” he said at last.

CHAPTER XIII

EVERARD began to watch the hands of the clock crawl round. His hands fidgeted, he moved restlessly, tortured by the fiercest impatience. Every minute was a year and when at last the hour struck in a high tinkle he felt that a lifetime had passed since the priest started.

He saw once more that picture which was burnt in on his brain—the little white room, the big father huddled at the bedside, *her* body on the bed and the seaweed dragging from her shoe. He lived again those haunted months in Eaton Square, when he fought against his conscience, admitted the blame and cursed himself for it. He saw himself struggling like a tiny fly in a spider's web until at last all the fight had gone out of him.

That time was so real, so present, that finally he began to believe that the Abbé had lied to him. Toinette *was* dead. If she had not died surely he would have known it, have felt it. Surely something would have communicated with his brain at the moment when he placed the revolver against his heart. If she had been alive was it possible that their mutual love would not have discounted land and sea. Would he not have heard her cry out to him? . . .

No, she must be dead and the Abbé had merely told him a sympathetic lie in order that he might get well. If that were so then why had he gone out, where had he

The Hour of Conflict

gone, what would he say when he returned without Toinette? . . . And yet he had not looked as if he were telling a lie. Those grey eyes had met his frankly and honestly. In that case if it were true that she was not dead why had he been made to suffer? Why had he been crushed and battered and brought to this? Ruddy had said that God was a sportsman. The Abbé had said so. Where was the sportsmanship in the way he had been treated?

The boy turned and twisted irritably and looked for the thousandth time at the clock. Would no one ever come? Was everybody dead?

The sun was sinking lower and lower and long shadows began creeping across the room until at last they touched his bed with their black fingers. Everard stifled a sob and buried his head in the pillow. It was hopeless.

"I don't believe it," he cried. "I don't believe it! Toinette is dead and Ruddy and the priest are liars. If God . . ."

He broke off and raised his head quickly. There was a sound at the bottom of the garden. He whispered, "Shut up!" to his heart, which began to beat so loudly that he could not hear distinctly. He held his breath. . . . There were murmurs, a word here, then another, then feet on the gravel.

There was a shuffle outside the house. Then the latch of the front door clicked and the voices began again, very low, in the hall.

Everard's eyes were fastened on the door. He sat up stiff and erect. The little clock seemed suddenly to tick more loudly and the cane seat of the chair at the side of the bed rustled all at once as if some invisible being had

The Hour of Conflict

just risen from it. The boy opened his mouth to call out and tell them to come in. But he made no sound. His lips and throat were dry and he remained staring at the door, expecting, hoping, praying that he might see Toinette. He moved with an impotent gesture and the pipe rolled off the bed on to the polished boards. The noise it made was startling.

Then at last there was a quiet step outside his room and a hand fumbling on the door. The lock squeaked and the door opened.

There stood the Abbé.

The boy gave a terrible cry in which there was the agony of despair, the misery of the damned.

From the passage there came an answering cry. The Abbé was pushed aside. Toinette, her hands outstretched, her eyes alight, Toinette like an angel from heaven, radiant with love, was at the bedside in a flash with her arms round Everard, laughing, sobbing, crying incoherent things. . . .

“Évérard! You have come back! My love. My dear. . . . Oh, Évérard!”

She caught him to her and kissed his lips and eyes and face and held him tight. The sight and touch of her snatched his soul back from the depths, gave him back life and reason.

The door closed quietly. Neither of them noticed it. God had decided. The Abbé had gone.

The boy's head rested on her breast. “Toinette!” he whispered. “Toinette! . . . You have come back to me. I have found you at last.”

For answer she gave a great sob and bent down and kissed him, murmuring his name. All those terrible summer months after her recovery, of waiting for him

The Hour of Conflict

to return, of doubt and suspense and at last of reconciling herself to the hideous truth that he had gone out of her life for ever, were flung into oblivion. Here he was, his dear head against her, making her tremble with joy and happiness. How she had prayed for this moment, the great and wonderful moment when she would see him again and feel his arms round her lifting her out of the agony of wondering and wondering whether he would come. Her thoughts had been of him day by day, and every night her pillow had been wet with tears. As the weeks had gone by and still he did not come hope had died and in its place was born despair. She, too, had plumbed the depths and cried out wildly that she might die.

"Let me look at you," said Everard. He pushed her gently back and gazed into her face long and silently. "It is you!" he said. "Oh, my dear! . . . Did you hear me when I prayed to you before I tried to shoot myself? Don't go away again, darling! You *can't* go, can you, now that we have found each other." He gave a sigh of immense relief and placed the palm of her hand on his mouth.

Toinette bent over him, her eyelashes damp with tears of joy, a smile on her lips. "No, I *can't* go away now. Without you I should have been a nun, but now . . . now I have got you back and you are my life and I belong to you."

The boy was clinging to her hand. With the other he felt her hair, her face, her neck, as though even now he were not sure that this was really Toinette. "Darling," he said, "I don't quite understand. When I went into your room that morning I saw you lying on your bed all white and cold and your hands were folded

The Hour of Conflict

across your breast and there was a piece of seaweed dangling from your shoe. Then I went away and I knew that I had killed you. . . . I saw you dead and now you are here alive. Toinette, what does it mean?"

It was getting quite dark in the little bare room. She put her arms close round him and her cheek against his. "It means that God did not want me to die," she whispered. "For nearly two days I was unconscious. They all thought that I was dead. But my life was given back to me, and, oh, Evérard, my dear, I could not understand why—then! I did not know where you were and you did not come and all the sun had gone out of the world. If you knew how much I wanted to die . . . Those empty days of hoping and hoping! . . . Oh!" She shivered and held him closer. "You will never leave me again?"

A curious look came into Everard's eyes as if he were seeing beyond her, far, far away into space . . . "Ruddy and the priest are liars," he had said. "If God . . ." and then Toinette had come.

Ruddy and the priest were not liars. She was the living proof. With this new and certain knowledge he looked at her very solemnly as if he felt a miracle within him.

"I love you," he said. "I shall always love you. He has given me another chance and if you will help me I will try to show that I am grateful."

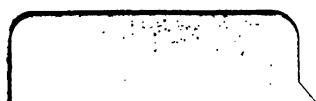
And Toinette suddenly knelt down by the bed and put her hand in his. "Dear God," she said. "Thank you for giving us back to each other. We will both try and show how grateful we are."

And there the Abbé came upon them hand in hand like little children.





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